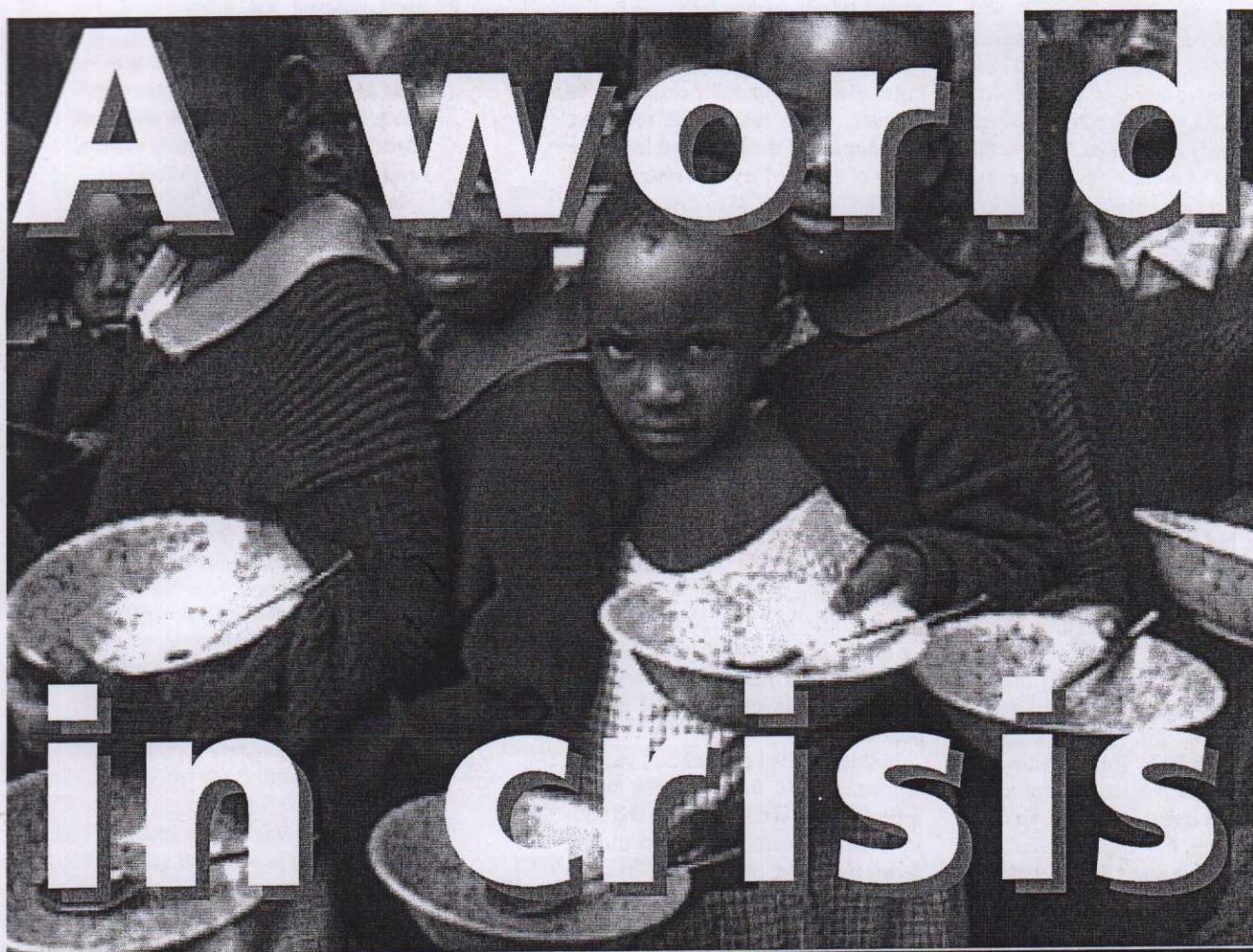


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*International
Perspectives of the
League for the
Fifth International*



Introduction

This year, 2008, opened with unprecedented turbulence among the financial institutions that have, to date, presided over capitalist globalisation. The USA was, according to Merrill Lynch, already in recession. On a weekly basis, banks were crashing – or rumours to that effect were circulating. Neoliberal gurus, who had hitherto declared the infallibility of the market, were calling for – and receiving – state intervention, even nationalisation.

At the same time, the beleaguered population of Gaza, Palestine broke through the Israeli siege, briefly, into Egypt; Pakistan was in a state of turmoil, after the murder of opposition leader, Benazir Bhutto; Venezuela's Hugo Chávez had suffered a serious setback after he had tried to grab more powers through a referendum; the French workers and youth had fought – and lost – round one in its battle against Nicolas Sarkozy.

It was in this febrile climate that the International Executive Committee of the League for the Fifth International met, at Easter 2008. This pamphlet contains the major political document that we passed. It contains our analysis of the world at this key turning point, and charts a path forward for revolutionary communists.

It starts with an analysis of the rapidly evolving credit crunch and its effect on other sectors of the world economy. Most capitalist commentators are now pointing to a likely recession in the USA, with severe effects for world capitalism as a whole. Rocketing food prices have led to violent riots around the globe.

Meanwhile, US imperialism's hegemony has continued to come under pressure. Fighting in Afghanistan has intensified, and "Taliban" attacks have spread to the cities. The claimed normalisation of the cities in Iraq has given way to full-scale fighting in Basra and Sadr City between the US and Iraqi puppet government forces and the militia of Moqtada al-Sadr. The stabilisation is now widely admitted to be illusory – Bush is so bogged down there that he is unable to launch the next round of planned attacks

against targets, such as Iran.

Since this document was written, the Pakistan elections have resulted in the installation of an unstable coalition government, which has not yet set about resolving any of the issues that led to the defeat of dictator Pervez Musharraf, who is waiting in the wings to strike back, the moment the new government gets into difficulties. Since we wrote these theses, the long nightmare of the Zimbabwe elections has gone on.

Drawn out too is the process of choosing a Democratic Party candidate in the United States. The outcome of the US elections will add a new dimension: the leading Democrat candidate Barack Obama's threat of an "attack on Pakistan" and affirmation that "the main enemy is political Islam"; Hillary Clinton's boosting of herself as Commander-in-Chief, willing to use the war machine; and John McCain's promise to stay in Iraq for 100 years; all point to a ruling class that sees no other way to preserve its domination except permanent war.

In this situation of combined war and economic crisis, the conditions for an intensification of class struggle and anti-imperialist resistance are maturing across the world.

However a great obstacle stands in the way of success for these struggles, indeed threatens many with falling short of their goals, if not defeat – the crisis of working class leadership. The annihilation of Rifondazione Comunista in the recent Italian parliamentary elections, the heavy losses for the French Communist Party in last year's presidential and this year's communal polls bear testimony to a crisis in reformism. At the same time, successes of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire at the polls and its launch of an initiative for a new anticapitalist party in France are another element of political ferment.

The League for the Fifth International, while fighting against widespread reformist, or utopian ideas and programmes, will not make the sectarian error of abstaining from common actions with forces that do not share our

ideas. Nor will we avoid participating in all serious discussions about what sort of party, national and international, the working class needs.

The time is increasingly urgent to build an international revolutionary tendency, which can fight more and more effectively for a new world party of social revolution, the Fifth International.

In this light the same IEC discussed the recent successes of the League for the Fifth International – the winning of sympathising sections in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with strong roots in the trade unions and the youth, discussions with groups of revolutionary Marxists in Turkey, India, Palestine and Venezuela – which all indicate that such a perspective is both realistic, and in need of hard work to mobilise the human and material resources to bring it to fruition.

It is in this context that we submit our international perspectives for the widest possible discussion.

Towards the end of US hegemony

The coming year will see the further destabilisation of globalisation, as its key dynamics reach their limits and become sources of weakness.

In the economic sphere, the restructuring and promotion of the interests of US finance capital have created an almost incalculable volume of fictitious capital, tied up in ever more impenetrable financial instruments, owned by banks and investment corporations around the world. At the same time, the era of cheap credit, which was the fundamental precondition for such speculation, has come to an end. The material foundation for cheap credit in the US was the export of cheap goods from China and Chinese purchase of US Treasury bonds. This combination fuelled the continuous expansion of the Chinese economy and the restructuring of world trade.

By 2007, the very scale of this expansion had forced up the price of energy, raw materials and food to produce China's highest rate of inflation for a decade, and bring to an end the deflationary impact of China's growth. This, in turn, raised the spectre of inflation and rising interest rates in the US, and triggered the sub-prime mortgage crisis, which finally began to reveal the lack of real assets behind the credit bubble.

Already, tens of billions of US dollars' worth of assets have had to be written off as valueless, and this unravelling of the international financial system will continue apace. The resulting credit crunch now threatens to paralyse other economic sectors, including both consumer spending and industrial investment.

Politically, globalisation required the opening up of markets around the world that had been protected by tariffs and other mechanisms. Protectionist regimes were removed, either by the

enforcement of IMF restructuring programmes, or by support for neoliberal regimes, willing to implement the "Washington consensus" of removing import controls and privatising public assets. Meanwhile, repressive regimes, such as those in Burma or Saudi Arabia, which were willing to collaborate with Washington and the multinational corporations, were left in power.

The inevitable consequence of opening up countries to "free trade" was the restructuring of their economies to provide cheap goods or raw materials for the world market, that is, the imperialist countries. In addition, imperialist monopoly capital succeeded in raising enormously the rate of super-exploitation from the semi-colonial world, by sucking out a mass of profit via interest rates and other means.¹

This trade could only ensure the growth of a tiny layer of increasingly corrupt officials and businessmen and increasing numbers in absolute poverty. Western sponsored NGOs moved in to provide some semblance of relief, while obstructing the development of political and social organisations of the poor and oppressed.

DESTABILISATION

Now, however, the sheer scale of inequality, matched only by the corruption of globalisation's beneficiaries, is fuelling the destabilisation of even the most supposedly "democratic" regimes. Preoccupation with the re-ordering of the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union has, meanwhile, allowed the development of more or less anti-neoliberal, anti-globalisation regimes in Washington's own "backyard", Latin America.

Although globalisation was primarily an economic phenomenon, it could never have been achieved by entirely

peaceful means. From the first Gulf War through the Balkan wars to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, economic predominance was backed up by military might.

After the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 this military policy went under the name of the war on terror, which not only equated opposition to US policy with terrorism, but gave all US allies free rein to introduce repressive and authoritarian measures against their own "enemies within", that is, those opposed to the policies and consequences of neoliberal policy. Now, the US is bogged down in Iraq, able to quell resistance only by incorporating its opponents and facing increasing opposition at home.

Both the economic and military features of globalisation were a product of the unrivalled hegemony of the USA after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but in this respect, too, the world is changing. In Europe, the pressure to compete with the US has forced the major powers, Germany and France, to undertake their own economic and political restructuring in an attempt to transform the EU into a more unified state, capable, in time, of at least competing on more equal terms, while Russia and China both manoeuvre on the world stage for future advantage.

While not yet challenged for supremacy, the US has increasingly to reckon with the prospect of rivals. Putin's presidency – like Bush's – will end in 2008, but his policies of active resistance and attempts to roll back the results of the US advance in Eastern Europe and Central Asia from 1991–2005 will continue under his successor. China's advance in Africa will likewise continue. Plainly, even if it is only in its first stages, a new phase of the redivision of the world is beginning, and it is the USA's world hegemony and power to take unilateral decisions that will come under challenge.

Lastly, the environmental consequences of 200 years of capitalist development have now accumulated to the scale, where the effects of global warming are directly visible, and the prospect of continued capitalist control of the world economy threatens the very natural basis of human civilisation. As if to emphasise the hypocrisy of the imperialist powers and their capitalist corporations, as they debated the "greening" of

globalisation, plans were drawn up to enable oil companies to exploit reserves in the polar regions that themselves have only recently been made accessible by global warming.

RESISTANCE

Globalisation, whether on the economic, political or military fronts, has not gone unopposed. In country after country a new generation of militants and activists has come to the fore to oppose it. Coordinated action spanning not just different countries but all the continents of the world is no longer an aspiration but a reality. The integration of worldwide production chains and distribution systems ensures the rapid transmission of developments, and shocks, from country to country.

Yet, opposition has not been enough to halt capitalist globalisation, let alone transform it into a consciously planned and integrated global economy. Time and again, those in the leadership of mobilisations and campaigns have proved themselves inadequate, lacking any strategy even to thwart globalisation's plans, to say nothing of overthrowing it and replacing it altogether.

In the Arab and Islamic world radical Islamism, whether in its mass populist form (Hezbollah, Hamas, etc.) or its terroristic/anti-imperialist forms (al-Qa'ida and its locally generated allies) has proved unable to lead mass resistance beyond a certain point, at which the reactionary consequences of any religious based ideology (communal rivalry, bigotry, socially reactionary views, sanctity of private property) begin to fracture and undermine the mass basis of the struggle.

Likewise Hugo Chávez' "Socialism of the 21st Century" is exposing its fundamentally bourgeois populist and reformist nature, by striking at the class independence of the workers at a trade union and political level, by resorting to anti-democratic bonapartist measures, and by taking refuge in the search for a bloc with the national bourgeoisie. A similar process is underway in Evo Morales' Bolivia, where the ranchers and bankers of the Media Luna provinces are forcing Morales into concessions on the hydrocarbon and land nationalisations.

The "new movement" of 1999-2001 (anticapitalist/altermondialiste/no global) is increasingly considered moribund

by many of its initiators (Walden Bello, Samir Amin). Their attempts to revive it – Porto Alegre and Bamako Declarations have failed.

This is due to the political grip of the reformist parties (Brazil's Workers Party (PT), European Left Party, Communist Party of India, CPI-Marxist) and the NGOs on the International Council of the World Social Forum, and their control of the purse strings of the events. The interventions of Chávez (Porto Alegre 2005, Caracas 2006) have likewise not shifted the shifted the bureaucratic grip of the Brazilian PT, NGO's and ATTAC in Europe.

This social liberal stranglehold could have been broken by the centrist left populist and libertarian forces that played an important role in initiating the summit sieges and antiwar mobilisations of 1999-2003 at street level (Fourth International, International Socialist Tendency, various Maoists and libertarians). But once again these forces showed their congenital incapacity to fight reformism.

At the level of the separate labour movements, the centrists likewise repeatedly aborted the desire of the vanguard to break from neoliberalism and potentially with reformism. Opportunities to create new workers parties on a militant, – even a revolutionary – basis were repeatedly squandered, because of their dogma that such parties must be "broad" and reformist.

Nevertheless, as globalised imperialist capitalism and its neoliberal ideology itself goes into crisis, spreading even greater destabilisation across the world, the inadequacy – and worse – of existing bureaucratic workers leaderships, trade union as well as political, will be ever more apparent not only to the vanguard, but to the masses in general. Once again, the opportunity for new revolutionary parties and an International will imperiously present itself.

This is the context, in which new, mass based parties of the working class must be created in all countries, and must be integrated and coordinated into a single international party of the working class, the Fifth International. But if these opportunities are not to end in frustration and disorientation once again, a more powerful international tendency has to be built that can grapple with the centrist and left reformist

fakers, win their cadres away from them, dig deep roots in the masses in struggle, and act as the rallying point for the new International.

The world economy in crisis

The year 2007 marked the beginning of the open, full outbreak of contradictions, which have accumulated in the period of globalisation and, particular, in the past years. The developments in the last 18 months confirm the League for the Fifth International's last congress summation of our assessment of the pre-revolutionary period we are living in:

"In summation, by the end of the 1990s, globalisation had proved that it could not overcome the tendencies to stagnation of capitalism. Its real successes – raising the rate of exploitation of the working class, penetrating and squeezing the semi-colonial world – were unable to fundamentally solve the over-accumulation of capital. In short, its successes were in certain countries only and for a limited time span. In fact, the general tendencies to stagnation have actually accelerated.

The stagnation trend of the productive forces also leads to their increasing transformation into forces of destruction, as the increasing scale of the ecological crisis demonstrates record levels of global warming, an increasing number of catastrophes with hundreds of thousands dead in 2005 alone, the threat of global pandemics etc. These destructive aspects of capitalism will grow in importance in the years ahead and contribute more and more to its social and political crisis.

Since capitalism is by its essence not only an economic but also a social and political system, the deepening of its crisis is also expressed in increasing competition between states, both imperialist and semi-colonial, an increase in wars, terrorism, impoverishment and destruction. We now find ourselves – even during the cyclical upswing – in a deepening period of social crisis, in which the imperialist bourgeoisie is forced to attack the working class and the oppressed on a global scale, in order to bolster its system. And if this is what happened in an upswing, imagine what an economic

downturn, let alone a global recession will bring. As the Christian bible asks: 'If these things are done when the tree is green, what shall be done when the tree is dry?'"

On the economic field, globalisation – far from opening a period of boom and stability – has been characterised by a tendency towards stagnation. This general tendency towards stagnation, which is based on the structural over-accumulation of capital, however, results in an uneven development.

While on one hand there are regions with higher growth rates – like China and India – most parts of the world, including the imperialist economies, rather saw lower growth rates than in the pre-globalisation period (see table 1). Behind these developments lies the fact, while the imperialist metropolises – the heart of world capitalism – are characterised by structural over-accumulation of capital, we see a process of rapid capital accumulation in some regions, which are the target of imperialist capital looking for higher profits (in the case of China, we see a combination of this process of imperialist capital export with domestic capital accumulation in a country where capitalism has been restored 15 years ago).

Globalisation's dynamic was to a large degree driven by specific measures of monopoly capital to offload the burden of capitalism's decline onto the working class, weaker sectors of capital, and semi-colonial economies (e.g. raising absolute surplus value by lowering real wages, increasing exploitation of the semi-colonial world, consumer boom financed by cheap credit, speculation boom). Later – in the 2000s – this was added to, by means of state capitalist economic intervention (e.g. in the USA "military Keynesianism", massively increased issues in state treasuries).

These counter-cyclical measures helped to avoid a "general crisis" (Marx), i.e. a sharp, generalised world recession, in the early 2000s, and ensued the upswing in the capitalist world economy's latest industrial cycle.

However, these counter-cyclical measures, sooner or later, had to exhaust themselves, and are incapable of ensuring a sustainable, longer growth period. As a result, globalisation's inner contradictions, which in the past helped world capitalism to overcome sharp recessions in some parts of the world, are now about to ensure a generalised world recession. A sign of the sharpening of the economic stagnation is the fact that the looming recession in the USA indicates that this cycle is substantially shorter than the last ones in the 1980s and 1990s (which lasted for about 10 years).

THE INDUSTRIAL CYCLE

The most recent expansionary phase of the capitalist cycle began in 2001, after a short US recession gave way to a sharp credit-fuelled recovery. US GDP growth rose sharply in 2004-05 – but growth was overwhelmingly in those sectors one would associate with a credit-fuelled expansion; retail, housing, professional services, arms all expanded sharply with millions of new jobs created. In the core sectors of the economy, however, and in particular in non-military and non-construction manufacturing, a sharp contraction took place, with around three million jobs being lost. Britain experienced a similar credit-based boom in 2004-06.

The underlying reason for the short and shallow nature of the 2001 recession lay in the geopolitical dynamics of the globalisation period. In addition to the tendency of the over-accumulation of capital, which is general feature of capitalism, as capital accumulation leads to breakdown and crisis, the uneven development of the world system, which followed the restoration of capitalism in the former workers' states and the opening of China and India to faster capitalist development created a global disinflationary environment.

The low organic composition of capital and higher profit rates in these countries plus China's entry into the WTO led to a vast expansion of trade generating superprofits in the West. The net disinflationary effect of this expansion allowed the imperialist bourgeoisie in the dominant US/British bloc to manipulate interest rates to ameliorate the impact of recession, and impart a strong domestic expansionary dynamic after 2001 – and to do so without aggravating inflation.

The 2004-06 US-British boom had a

political effect, raising the bourgeoisie's ideological confidence, cossetting the petit bourgeoisie and labour aristocracy, numbing the labour bureaucracy, and pushing centrism to the right. In Britain it formed the objective background to a process of bringing pessimists, routinists, and opportunists together in a large revisionist minority, and splitting our own organisation.

Of course, the uneven and parasitic form of the expansion, involving house price inflation and every form of speculative activity, made this feverish expansion prone to end in disaster. And indeed, as soon as Chinese capitalist development inevitably began to generate inflationary pressures of its own, the credit system collapsed in anticipation of the end of the boom.

US and British growth rates fell sharply as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall reasserted itself powerfully. Profits fell; retail sales fell; house prices fell; currency values fell. The potential is revealed for globalisation's historic "strength" – its desperate reliance on extreme forms of credit expansion, based on high profit rates in the East – to invert and become its weakness; the contagion of over-accumulation and attendant crisis of devaluation could now spread. Crisis is the latest phenomenon to be "globalised".

Whereas the expansionary phase of the capitalist cycle is broadly predictable in its length, averaging seven to 10 years, because of the turnover time of fixed capital, this predictable periodicity does not however apply to the crisis and recessionary phases of the cycle, which are governed by competitive traumatic devaluations of capital, driven by subjective forces and the specific historical, political, geographical, ecological and class struggle conditions.

The conditions that served to shorten the crisis and recession in 2001-02 no longer pertain. There is every possibility that in the absence of the global disinflationary pressures of 2002-06, this crisis and recession will be deep.

EFFECTS OF US RECESSION

The outcome of the period of globalisation from 1992 to 2007 has, therefore, so far been an overall stagnation of the productive forces: the growth in the East is compensated for, and offset by the persistently sluggish growth rates in the

imperialist metropolises: the USA, Britain, Japan and Europe.

The high growth of the boom years in the USA has come to a shuddering halt, with GDP growth falling from 4.9 per cent in the third quarter of 2007 to just 0.6 per cent in the fourth quarter. Growth in Germany, Japan and Eastern Europe are all under threat from the credit crunch. Asian exports will be hit hard by the US recession.

The possibility now is that the global crisis of 2007-08 could open not merely a recessionary phase in the cycle, but something more: a new period, one characterised not by stagnation, but by outright decline of productive forces.

In 2007, we saw the first signs of an approaching recession in the US itself. Rising prices for fuel, raw materials and labour in China brought the prospect of inflation and higher interest rates. These then triggered the crisis in the USA's sub-prime mortgage market, when it became clear that thousands of poorer US home owners would be unable to keep up mortgage payments.

These sub-prime loans had been packaged into new forms of debt, called Collateralised Debt Obligations, and sold on the financial markets around the world. In June and July, a number of US banks, hedge funds and investment funds were forced to recognise that their holdings of these "assets" were practically valueless – and this was then repeated in the other centres of world banking.

In response, the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England were forced to pump billions into their banking systems, because banks themselves, unable to calculate each other's assets, were reluctant to extend credit except at punitive interest rates. This credit crunch reflects the enormous role credit played, in inflating and exaggerating the recovery after 2001.

The mid-decade boom has itself been highly uneven among the imperialist metropolises and the developing semi-colonial states, with the European Union and Japan coming into it later than the USA, Britain and China. The social impact of this growth has also been much more uneven than in the booms of the post-war era.

In countries as varied as the USA, mainland Europe, China, Brazil and India, only privileged minorities have really seen their living standards substantially increase. Large sections of the

workers and peasants have actually experienced declining living standards, and slashed social welfare provision. As a result, despite the "boom", social inequality has increased, and with it the potential for class conflict.

The onset of a cyclical crisis will pose vital questions to each national capitalist class:

How to offload the costs of crisis onto the working class, the peasantry and the petit bourgeoisie, via, for example, unemployment, wage and social cuts

How to offload them onto other, rival, capitalist classes, via currency devaluation, and formal or informal protectionism.

How the biggest and strongest sections of capital can offload the losses onto the smaller and weaker ones.

Thus, in any serious and prolonged recession we can expect a heightening of the class struggle, and an increase in friction between states. This is the context, within which the working classes of the world will have to fight to defend and extend their interests and their organisations in the coming period.

The war on terror

The Bush-Cheney administration had already chosen the Middle East as the main focus for asserting US power before 9/11. The plan to invade Iraq, topple Saddam, seize control of its vast oil reserves, and install a friendly government that would allow the US to station troops in permanent bases was in existence before the Twin Towers fell.

The rapid victory over Saddam, however, was the last easy ride George Bush was going to have. In 2005-06 his plans for stabilisation fell apart and the costs and casualties mounted, making the war increasingly unpopular at home.

The Democrats swept both Houses of Congress in 2006, because they were perceived as the party that would set about withdrawing US troops from Iraq – by restricting the administration's war budget and restraining it from attacking Iran or Syria. In fact, Bush rapidly proved their utter spinelessness by sending a further 30,000 troops for a "surge" which, despite an increase in casualties, both Iraqi and US, has been presented as a successful pacification. Now, with the ten-month process of the presidential election campaign underway, the Democratic front runners, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, are once again posing as the candidates who will "bring our boys home".

What lies behind the relative success of the surge? First, the massive increase of US troops on the ground, although this has been at the expense of a surge in US casualties. By autumn, there were over 175,000 US military personnel in Iraq, and deaths reached a record annual high of 899.

Second, from January 2005 US rule in Iraq has been dependent on a de facto alliance with Shia parties and militias. In 2007 it moved to win itself a base in the Sunni areas, long alienated by the dissolution of the old Iraqi army, the sacking of all the Ba'athist state bureaucracy, atrocities, like the sieges of Fallujah, and the USA's apparent willingness to rule through the Shia alone. This turned the Sunni into the most fertile ground for

the resistance movement.

By late 2006 the US realised it had to change strategy. The surge has only had its limited success due to alliances with Sunni tribal authorities, thereby alarming the Shia. The Awakening Movement, an armed militia of up to 80,000 across the country, has become a lynchpin of the American strategy.

But there is little sign that the resistance has done more than relocate and temporarily stand down its operations, as any guerrilla force would do when the enemy advances in overwhelming force. As long as the occupation goes on so will the resistance.

IRAN

In mid-2007, a major conflict broke out within the US ruling class, as the Bush-Cheney administration's strategy for war against Iran came to light. The Pentagon had drafted war plans, the CIA deployed extra resources and America's most "reliable" allies, including Israel, Britain and Australia, had been approached for their support. Three aircraft carrier strike groups were sent to the Gulf and another Expeditionary Strike Group took up position off the Lebanese coastline, able to strike Syria and Hezbollah bases in Lebanon.

Such an attack would unleash incalculable results. Iran would almost certainly launch missile attacks against US and British forces in Iraq and their warships in the Gulf. Even a "limited strike" on the Iranian Revolutionary Guards would destabilise Iraq, since millions of Iraqi Shia are sympathetic towards Iran, and the puppet government is dominated by Shia parties. A US attack on Iran, far from re-establishing US hegemony over the region, could open a final phase of its disintegration.

In addition, the US bourgeoisie is also experiencing increasing pressure at home, as the anti-war mood grows. The report of the intelligence services on the nuclear programme of Iran was, as well, a big blow for the Bush administration. In this situation, it is getting more and

more difficult for them to justify an attack on Iran, without risking huge class struggles. Thus, the US military and intelligence services have made it increasingly clear that they are not in favour of such an attack.

Does this make it impossible? No, improbable but far from impossible, because there are many rogue factors. Al-Qa'ida attacks on painful US targets, engineered provocations with Iran, Israeli adventures, all could provide the pretext for a last desperate throw of the dice for the White House neoconservatives, eager to save the USA's post-9/11 unilateral exercise of its power from disaster.

Also, if the military option is unlikely to be taken at the moment, the threat of further sanctions remains. In 2007 we saw a whole series of sanctions that became more and more aggressive in the course of the year. Beginning with sanctions aimed to limit the import of different resources needed for the enrichment of uranium, continuing with the explanation that Iran's Revolutionary Guards are a terrorist organisation, and ending with UN resolution 1803 that also targets the import of civilian commodities, we can observe an increasing pressure on the Iranian regime. The embargo against Iraq after the Gulf war of 1991 showed that weapons are not the only way to kill people; imperialist countries use sanctions, as well, to increase the pressure on semi-colonial countries.

In addition, the USA is also trying to arm its allies in the Middle East. It has already organised joint training missions with Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. According to the American air force deputy under-secretary for international affairs, "It's about flying together, operating together and training together so, if we have to, we can fight together."

Furthermore Bush agreed to send sophisticated bombs worth \$120 million to Saudi Arabia, when he last visited the country. This will be a part of a \$20 billion military aid package to US allies in the Gulf region. Therefore, all progressive forces have to fight against the threat of further sanctions, and the threat from American client states in the region.

AFGHANISTAN

The NATO occupation of Afghanistan is turning into another Iraq by the day. Occupation casualties are mounting steadily (2004: 58; 2005: 130; 2006: 191;



Palestinian militants break down the border between Egypt and Israel

2007: 232). This has led the US administration to publicly call on its European allies to shoulder their "share of the fighting and the dying" (US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, Munich Security Conference, February 2007).

According to Western sources, around 5,000 "Taliban" have fought ten times that number of NATO troops to a standstill in southern Afghanistan, opening up rifts between the British and Americans on the one hand, and the other EU NATO powers, particularly Germany, that are resisting being drawn in to play a battlefield role in the south. In addition there has been mounting and open friction with president Muhammed Karzai's puppet government, especially with the UK forces fighting in Helmand (e.g. expulsion of British representatives for seeking "negotiations with the Taliban"). The US-UK military are blaming their defeats on the "open border" to Pakistan and the Taliban's bases there. Increased US bombing across the border is likely in the year ahead.

The resistance, an alliance of Taliban and local, tribal-based communities, is becoming more popular and spreading out from its southern stronghold, even striking in Kabul. This in turn has forced President Karzai to strike a more independent pose (e.g. his rejection of Paddy Ashdown as UN Envoy on the grounds that the West was doing "more harm than good") and adopt more Islamist garb (e.g. calling for the death sentence of Pervez Kambaksh for downloading and distributing an article on women's rights).

Despite being heralded as "the winnable war" by UK military chiefs less

than a year ago, Afghanistan will be a source of growing resistance to the war on terror in the Muslim world and the belligerent countries.

CIVIL WAR IN PALESTINE

For over eighteen months, Israel blockaded Gaza's 1.5 million inhabitants in punishment for electing Hamas, a Sunni Islamist movement that, under pressure from its mass base, refused to recognise the Zionist State, or renounce the armed struggle altogether. Hundreds of factories were shut down, throwing 25,000 out of work. Gaza was sealed off from the outside world by a fence, guarded by watchtowers, snipers and tanks.

Then in January 2008, under Hamas leadership, the Gazan masses broke through the border fence to Egypt, keeping it open or eleven days. During this time, there were open demonstrations in Egypt, in support of the Palestinians.

Meanwhile Israel, through the good offices of the USA, engaged in another monstrous deception to add to the infamous Oslo Agreement. In this it has the full collaboration of the Fatah presidency, headed by Mahmoud Abbas and based in the West Bank. At the "peace" talks in Annapolis, USA (November 27 2007), Abbas accepted a 437-word resolution, which places not a single demand that Israel would find unacceptable, while insisting that the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority forces ensure the "security of Israel" by dismantling "terrorist organisations". This is, in effect, a demand that the Palestinian Authority crush all resistance – including that of Hamas – to Israel, as a precondition for any settlement.

The siege of Gaza must be broken; the

declaration of Annapolis made a dead letter. This means supporting the resistance fighting the Israelis' occupation and the traitors under Fatah's leadership, and demanding Britain and the EU recognise the elected Hamas government and supply aid to Gaza.

Both Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert are endorsing a "two-state" solution. Abbas' position exposes him for what he is: a weak puppet of the US. Recognising Israel as an exclusively Jewish state and agreeing to crush any resistance to it and US imperialism would be an arch-reactionary solution to the conflict.

South Asia in turmoil

South Asia has seen a number of important changes in the last few years, with serious struggles against despotism in Pakistan and Burma and the growing power, and internal contradictions, of India.

BURMA

The military regime, which has held Burma in its iron grip for nearly 20 years, reacted with wholesale and savage repression when faced with an unarmed and consciously peaceful revolution in 2007, just as it had done before in 1988. This latest massacre was a well-calculated attempt to destroy an entire new generation of young militants, and atomise and terrorise the great mass of the population, which had begun to gain confidence during the demonstrations, led by students and monks.

Burma's corrupt and arch-reactionary junta certainly line their own pockets, but they also make profits for international capital. Their police state promotes the systematic use of forced and unpaid labour (a form of temporary slavery) on infrastructural projects for joint ventures with multinationals, notably in building pipelines for the gas and oil sector, the country's biggest source of foreign currency.

The list of collaborators is a who's who of corporate profiteers: Caterpillar and Chevron (USA), GlaxoSmithKline (UK), Total (France), Siemens (Germany), Swift (Belgium), Daewoo and Hyundai (Korea), China National Petroleum Corp and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (China), Gas Authority of India and ONGC Videsh Ltd (India). For this reason, the protests of Barbara Bush and her ilk, against the slaughter in Burma soon died away.

This carnage shows that a capitalist army, led by its high command and officer corps, is a permanent, terrifying danger above all to its own people, those it is supposedly paid to defend. It shows too that Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy's hopes for a peaceful revolution, based on non-violent

direct action, is a strategy for disaster. Important, and indeed inevitable, as mass unarmed street demonstrations are at the beginning of any revolution, alone they are insufficient to win.

Only mass workers' strike action, halting the wheels of the national economy, only workers and peasants' militias, culminating at a critical moment in an armed uprising, can destroy such a regime and replace it with one based on democratically elected councils of delegates of workers, peasants and the youth. If, in the process, the army is not disintegrated by winning over the rank and file soldiers, if their officer corps and high commands are not overthrown and liquidated in the course of a revolution, then the tragic experience of Chile in 1973, of China in 1989 and of Burma itself in 1988 will be repeated again and again. Burma showed the terrible price of not learning the lessons of the October Revolution – a price paid virtually on its 90th anniversary.

INDIA

India, next to China, has been the object of huge exaggeration regarding its development ("India Shining"). Certainly it has seen 8 per cent per annum rises in GDP in recent years. But, as elsewhere, the benefits of this growth have been extremely unevenly distributed.

In 2007, India accounted for the fourth highest number of dollar billionaires in the Forbes List, rising from eighth in 2006. At the same time, the country slipped from 126 to 128 in the United Nations Human Development Index, which takes into account such factors as life expectancy, adult literacy rates and enrolments in nursery, primary and secondary education, as well as GDP per capita, on the basis of purchasing power parity. This puts India below a series of countries, noted for their poverty or afflicted by destructive wars: Guatemala (118), Bolivia (117), Botswana (106), the occupied Palestinian Territories (105), El Salvador (103) and Sri Lanka (99).

2007 marked 30 years of rule for the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led Left Front in West Bengal (population 80 million). While the Left Front carried out significant land and social reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, it has been converted, over the last decade, to a full-blown neoliberal policy, giving huge perks to foreign multinationals to invest in the province.

Last year witnessed forcible land acquisition for a car factory in Singur, and two major incidents aimed at clearing peasants off land wanted for corporate development. The first was in March, and the second in the first half of November at Nandigram, where people, including many traditional CPI-M supporters, revolted when the government imposed a Special Economic Zone on them. CPI-M party thugs launched a campaign of arson, looting, murder and rape to suppress them.

Discontent among India's impoverished peasantry, especially the Adivasis (indigenous peoples), has provided a powerful social base for an expanding Maoist guerrilla movement. The Naxalites go back 40 years, taking their name from Naxalbari, in West Bengal, where armed Maoist guerrilla groups sprang up in the jungle and remote countryside, relating to peasant disturbances against rich landlords.

Their activities were episodic and localised for decades, but in September 2004 the two main movements – the People's War Group in central India and the Maoist Communist Centre of India, which is active in Bihar – joined forces to create a single, Maoist party, the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Since then, Naxalite actions have spread to 16 of the 28 states, stretching from the Nepalese border to India's southwest coast.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called Naxalism "the biggest internal security threat India has ever had to face". A Naxalite leader recently told *Le Monde Diplomatique*: "Our aim is to take control of the countryside, where the state is weak, and then gradually extend our power to the cities. It's a long-term strategy, but globalisation and its consequences, inequality and poverty, are speeding things up."

This classic Maoist strategy is doomed to failure as a means to overthrow Indian capitalism, but it indicates the scale of inequality and exploitation in the coun-

tryside and the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, where, as is the case in most of India, land reform has never begun or is being, in effect, reversed by expropriating land for foreign and local corporate elites.

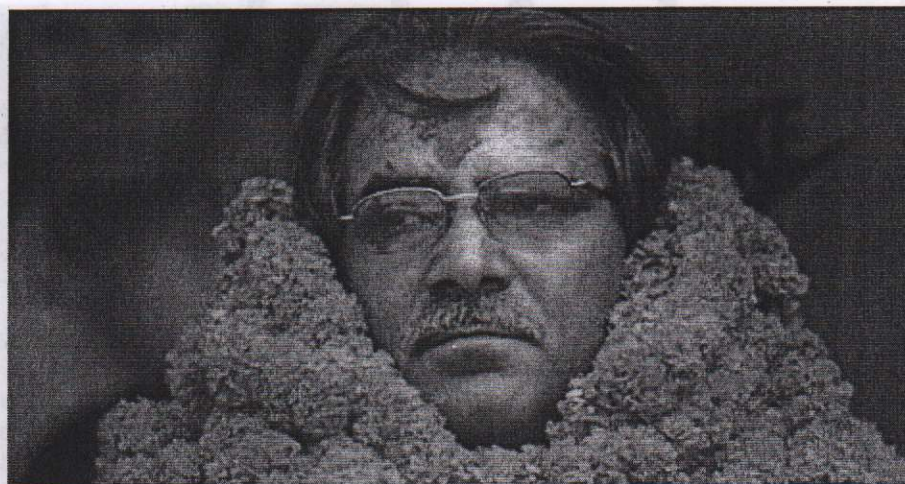
Protests at the effects of neoliberal policies have also shaken Bangladesh, where garment workers in Dhaka organised a 10,000 strong demonstration, in open defiance of the emergency laws, demanding higher wages and improved conditions of work. The marches were eventually broken up by the army and police, whose actions are increasingly politicising the economic struggles of the workers.

SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, the war against the Tamil Tigers has been massively stepped up in 2007. About 200,000 people have been turned into refugees; approaching 5,000 have been killed, and nearly 2,000 "disappeared". Assassinations of Tamil political representatives have become common, most recently the Tamil parliamentarian Nadarajah Raviraj.

Yet, the great defenders of democracy and the warriors against terror in Washington and the capitals of imperialist Europe have said scarcely a word about all this. Indeed, they have officially characterised the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who are fighting for independence in the nationally distinct region in the north and east of the island, as a terrorist organisation, thus effectively including it in their war on terror.

Mahinda Rajapaksa's government,



Prachanda, leader of the Nepalese Maoists, is now heading a bourgeois government

after seizing the LTTE-held areas in the eastern province, thanks largely to the Tiger defector Colonel Karuna, launched an all-out offensive, aimed at destroying the Tigers militarily. This has placed a crippling burden on Sri Lanka's economy. Defence expenditure rose by 45 per cent in 2007, and will rise by another 20 per cent in 2008.

Inevitably, the working class and the urban and rural poor are bearing the cost in the form of soaring inflation, cutbacks to public sector jobs, slashed fuel and food subsidies and services, as well as the rising toll of military and civilian casualties and refugees in the war zone. Now the war is leading to "blowback" in the south, with bombings and assassinations, the persecution of Tamil minority communities, and attacks on those who oppose the war. The government prom-

ised to end the war by the end of last year. Yet the killing and destruction go on.

Whilst the government is seeking its "final solution", the effects of the war on the economy are disastrous, and are leading to a growing wave of resistance by the working class. Trade unions – fragmented though they are politically – have been waging a series of struggles. Health workers and plantation workers have struck, and a series of unions have promised strike action in April or May. Clearly a massive economic struggle for the livelihoods of all Sri Lanka's workers is urgently needed, but this must also take up the roots of the misery – the war and the country's subservience to imperialism.

NEPAL

After 10 years of guerrilla struggle in the countryside, Nepal's Maoist party agreed to join the ruling government coalition of capitalist Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) took this step even though the hated monarchy of King Gyanendra was still in place.

Despite the self-sacrifice of the CPN (M)'s militants, it was not their long guerrilla struggle that brought this absolutist dictatorship to an end, but the mass revolution in April 2006 in the cities, especially in the capital Katmandu. Workers and youth shut down the city in a general strike, paralysed the armed forces, and threatened a full-scale insurrection. If the Maoists had put their 15,000 rifles at the disposal of the mass movement, they could have broken the discipline of the army and police, stormed the royal palace and sub-



An Tamil Tiger member with seized Sri Lankan army weapons



Zardani, the widower of Benazir Bhutto and former enemy Nawaz Sharif formed a new government in Pakistan

jected Gyanendra and his family to proletarian justice as well as opening a struggle for working class power.

Instead, the CPN (M) acted in perfect accordance with its Maoist ideology. Pursuing Stalin's theory of revolution by stages, it renounced a socialist revolution, in favour of a democratic revolution. After some hesitation, it entered a popular front government as well. While the Constituent Assembly – dominated by an alliance of bourgeois parties with the Communist Party of Nepal and CPN (M) – has finally abolished the monarchy, it has not expropriated the big landowners (and given all their land to the peasants), large-scale industry and the banks. Maoism has shown its Stalinist character once again, and thus its inability to lead the revolution in south Asia.

PAKISTAN

The assassination of Pakistan Peoples Party leader Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007 conveniently removed the only really effective rival to President Pervez Musharraf, though it clearly upset the plans of US and British imperialism for a diarchy – with all the advantages of a military dictatorship and a pro-US “democracy”. Whether Musharraf or some of those close to him were complicit in Bhutto's death, he can be fairly satisfied with the immediate results. The spontaneous outburst of anger in the days following Bhutto's death came to an end, when her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, de facto leader of the Pakistan People's

Party, used all his influence to take the masses off the streets.

Musharraf's constitutional changes are also beyond legal challenge and massively strengthened the power of the presidency against the parliament. In addition, any challenge to Musharraf's appointment as president will be constitutionally impossible until 2012.

The February elections will not settle the issues that are dividing Pakistan. Not one of the parties standing deserved the vote of the working masses. Those workers, youth and progressive forces, exposing the farce of parliamentary politics under Musharraf's baton, and arguing for a boycott of this election, were correct, even though large numbers followed the PPP and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, the other opposition party led by Nawaz Sharif, to the polls.

The intensification of fighting in the North West Frontier Province, Balochistan and Waziristan has created openly civil war conditions in these provinces, as the Pakistan army seeks to do the USA's bidding and defeat the armed Islamists, who have been aiding the Afghan resistance. In the latest round of fighting, over 800 Pakistani troops have been killed or are missing, and the military claims a kill over 1,500 militants with similar civilian casualties. The Pakistan military is far from gaining the upper hand in these conflicts, despite its claims to have wiped out whole bands of militants.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates

declared in mid-January that, as instability grows in Pakistan, the US military and CIA are thinking of increasing their own operations within the country. Democrat front-runners Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton have both affirmed that they would be prepared to send in US troops, and sanction air strikes.

In short, the present situation is far from being a stabilised, democratic or military Bonapartist counter-revolutionary one. On the contrary, Pakistan is in a profoundly revolutionary period, passing repeatedly from pre-revolutionary to revolutionary situations, with intervals of unsteady equilibrium, caused by the terrible crisis of the trade union and political leadership of the masses.

The left needs to concentrate, in the weeks or months ahead, on thrashing out an action programme and a nationwide fighting party organisation that can lead workers, peasants and the urban poor in the struggles ahead. Agitation needs to centre on the demand for a sovereign Constituent Assembly, for revolutionary demands to solve the question of rural and urban poverty. Without addressing the fundamental problem of the need for a new political leadership – a new revolutionary workers' party – to break with the hold of the treacherous and corrupt capitalist opposition parties, the crisis of leadership cannot be resolved.

China

Since the 1992 decision to dismantle the planned economy and restore capitalism, China has become an increasingly important component of the global economic system. The export processing industry – based on foreign direct investment, primarily from the overseas Chinese bourgeoisie, state subsidies and the exploitation of cheap labour – has played a central role in stabilising the US economy and restructuring global production. Cheap Chinese imports of consumer goods have had a powerful deflationary effect in the US, and the Chinese purchase of US Treasury bonds has had a similar effect by keeping interest rates low.

This combination of sustained growth in China and low inflation in the US led some to predict the achievement of a new global economic model that could ensure long-term stability, but such optimism is misplaced and misinterprets cyclical phenomena for a permanent economic transformation. Similarly, optimism or, perhaps, an ideological desire to prove the efficacy of capitalism has led to exaggerated estimates of the overall

size of China's economy. A recent World Bank estimate, based on a more rigorous application of purchasing power parity calculations, concluded that total GDP for 2005 was closer to \$5 trillion than the \$11 trillion previously quoted.

The present cycle of the Chinese economy began in 2001, with its accession to the World Trade Organisation, and since then economic growth, in GDP terms, has been above 10 per cent, per year. Such high growth rates were made possible, by the opening of new markets abroad, and the continued development of the domestic economy in the world's most populous country. Rapid development, however, has encouraged disproportionate fixed investments of above 40 per cent of GDP annually, despite repeated government measures to curtail it.

Chinese demand has contributed to a worldwide rise in prices of energy and raw materials, and the continuing expansion of production has led to shortages of skilled labour, and a resulting rise in wages at home. Moreover, China now has the highest foreign exchange reserves in the world, some \$1.4 trillion, and has

found it impossible to prevent this also feeding into inflationary pressures in the domestic economy.

As a result, 2007 saw the first general increase in the price of Chinese commodities entering the USA, a development that has already had a significant impact and indicates that the present cycle is nearing its peak. A cyclical downturn in China will exacerbate the social tensions and conflicts, created by the restoration of capitalism and the drive for growth.

The World Bank's most recent figures show that capitalist development has been as socially divisive and uneven in China as elsewhere. In 2005, some 300 million were living on less than the equivalent of a dollar a day and those numbers would be swelled in a downturn, particularly because of its impact on migrant workers, of whom there may be as many as 150 million, who have few, if any, entitlements to welfare.

The growth of inequality, the collusion of state and party officials in land seizures, unsafe working conditions and the denial of workers' basic rights have led to tens of thousands of protests in recent years. Some of these have been coordinated over different provinces – evidence of a developed "underground" of unofficial organisation – and many of which have involved armed clashes with the paramilitary police. The introduction of the "Labour Contract Law" in January 2008 is a clear recognition by Beijing of the need for some reforms.

But the only permitted trade unions, those belonging to the All China Federation of Trades Unions, remain under party control and can never become independent workers' organisations. Consequently, workers will be forced to develop their own organisations, and any large-scale mobilisations or disputes will automatically come into conflict with the state and party authorities. For this reason, trade union organisation alone will prove inadequate and the building of a mass-based workers' party will be essential.



Demonstrations against China's oppression of the Tibetans were broadcast across the world

Russia: flexing its muscles

After the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991, the 1992 "shock therapy" (price liberalisation, abolition of the monopoly of foreign trade, cutting subsidies, voucher privatisation) finally disintegrated the state owned, and bureaucratically planned Russian economy. This led, via hyperinflation and mass unemployment, to a deep depression. Official statistics indicate that, from 1990 to the end of 1995, Russian GDP declined by 50 per cent.

Overall decline continued till it was hit by the financial crash of 1998. Industry and, above all, the sources of its valuable raw materials fell into the hands of a small number of city and provincial governors, former managers and central bankers, all linked to a Kremlin clique around Boris Yeltsin.

Out of this stratum of former apparatchiks, who made the state economy a source of primitive capital accumulation, a group of multi-millionaires and billionaires crystallised, known collectively as the oligarchs. However, the central state found itself enormously weakened, and unable to collect a huge proportion of its tax revenues.

Unable, therefore, to maintain a large part of its military-industrial complex, Russia lost all control and even most of its influence over its "near abroad" - i.e. the former Soviet Union republics outside the Russian Federation. What is more, formally autonomous regions, like Chechnya, asserted and, for a time, won de facto independence (in the first Chechen war, 1994-96).

America and the European Union were able to blatantly ignore Russia's interests in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Balkans. It is therefore no surprise that the upper echelons of the state forces - particularly in the successor to the KGB, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) - looked for a way to restore the power of the Russian state, internally and then abroad.

The Russian financial crisis of 1998 offered them an opportunity and, in

September 1998, a rapid process of takeover from the Yeltsin clique began (sometimes referred to as a coup). Suspicious "terrorist" bombings of apartment blocks in Moscow and other cities were used as an excuse to transfer much of the presidential powers to the then prime minister, Vladimir Putin, a key figure in the network of supposedly resigned, "ex-FSB" officers.

Putin's installation of emergency powers and anti-terrorist measures is an interesting precursor of the 9/11 "war against terror" model. He speedily launched the second Chechen war, which culminated in the bloody siege of the capital Grozny (December 1999 - February 2000). This genocidal victory made Putin popular at home, and ensured him a landslide victory in the presidential elections.

Around this time, recovery from the great depression of the 1990s and the financial crash of 1998 took hold. Rising world oil and gas prices enabled Russia to enter a substantial economic upswing.

TOWARDS A NEW COLD WAR?

Putin then set about removing the biggest of the Yeltsin era oligarchs, who would not play ball with his strengthening of the Russian state, and who imagined they could create their own political parties, linked to Western neoliberal institutions. Figures, like Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky (magnates from Sibneft and Yukos oil/gas conglomerates), found themselves in exile or in gaol.

At the same time, attempts by pro-US pseudo-NGOs began to foment "revolutions" to remove pro-Russian governments in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and the central Asian republics. This was quite enough to spur Putin to clamp down on any internal opposition that might be tempted to try the same things within Russia.

To the dismay of the Washington neoliberals and their media, Russian

capitalism has rowed back towards a greater degree of state capitalist direction of the economy, along lines which occasion little comment when pursued by the Chinese: i.e. strong ties between finance, industrial capital and the executive, all combined with the crushing of internal opposition, control of the media, and keeping working class organisation weak.

On this basis, and by promoting export-led growth, based on low wages and high raw material prices, the Russian economy has temporarily flourished. This has resulted in growth rates of around 8 per cent. The sweeping victory of Dmitry Medvedev and United Russia in the presidential and parliamentary elections will see a continuation of that strategy.

As we have seen, this allows Russia to be far more assertive on the world stage. Russia's control of vast strategic oil and gas reserves allows it to bribe and threaten its way to reassert its imperialist sphere of influence in Central Asia, and potentially in parts of the Balkans too. It also gives it an economic pressure point against any too aggressive behaviour from the European Union and Nato.

In short, the Russian bourgeoisie will continue to forcefully resist attempts by the other major imperialisms to make it pay for their crisis, while also attacking the democratic rights of its own working class and the national minorities, e.g. Chechnya. In the former aspect of this strategy, it is trying to deepen its alliance with China - e.g. joint military exercises - though any more formal alliance will have to stand the challenge of rivalry for control of far eastern oil and gas reserves, which an oil-poor China has its eyes on.

Latin America

Latin America, as a whole, has witnessed an average annual growth rate of around of 5 per cent since 2004, relatively high compared to the previous, recessionary period, 1998-2002, let alone the "lost decade" of the 1980s. This growth has been mainly fuelled by the worldwide demand for minerals and agricultural products (e.g. Chile's 6 per cent growth, due to world copper prices) rather than the systematic growth of domestic industry.

Economic growth has been so grossly unequal that, while the middle classes have prospered, the working class and the urban poor have continued to suffer. Latin America is now the most unequal region in the world. Moreover, according to the World Bank, nearly 25 per cent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day.

The continent has also witnessed a tide of neo-populist movements and governments. These roughly fall into two groups: one, mildly social democratic, such as Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Tabaré Vázquez of Uruguay, and Luis Inácio 'Lula' da Silva of Brazil, who have pursued policies roughly in line with the International Monetary Fund; the other, more radical populists, like Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivia's Evo Morales, and Ecuador's Rafael Correa. In 2006 there were failures by radicals like Ollanta Humala in Peru, and moderates like López Obrador in Mexico.

Argentina's Néstor Kirchner lies somewhere between the camps, flirting with Chávez' ideas of Latin American economic cooperation, truculently resisting the advice of the IMF, but not undertaking any of the radical reforms, nor adopting the socialist rhetoric of the Venezuelans. Kirchner's successor and wife, Cristina Fernandez, is expected to pursue a more conservative policy than her husband. In 2007, there was a marked revival of militant trade union struggles.

VENEZUELA

Venezuela is, along with Bolivia, the main cauldron of radicalism on the con-

tinents. Since the failure of the 2002 coup, Chávez, under pressure from the masses, moved sharply leftward in his rhetoric. In 2005, at the World Social Forum, he openly espoused socialism. After his landslide re-election in December 2005, he pledged a transition towards socialism. In early 2007 he launched a new party – the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which, between March and August 2007, 5.7 million people signed up to. Chávez called for all other socialist parties to dissolve, putting pressure on the three largest – the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), Homeland for All (PPT) and Por la Democracia Social (Podemos), a social democratic party – to do so.

However, in the referendum campaign in November-December 2007, Chávez' bonapartist tendencies became ever more open and caudillo-like. His narrow defeat in the referendum on his amendments to the Bolivarian constitution has



The Bolivarian revolution suffered a set back in December 2007 when Chávez lost the referendum

opened a debate within his movement and more broadly in the working class. His "forward ever backward never" prestige has been weakened, and the opportunity given to stimulate workers' democracy in the workplaces, the shantytowns, and the PSUV.

Chávez' words after the referendum – "We cannot allow ourselves to be dragged along by extremist currents... No! We have to seek out alliances with the middle classes, even with the national bourgeois... I am obliged to slow down the pace of the march." – indicates moves to the right, yielding to the bourgeois forces within the Bolivarian movement and in the state machine. With the correct tactics, including a vigorous entry tactic within the PSUV, it may be possible to create a real mass basis for a revolutionary workers' party. That at least must be the goal that revolutionaries strive for.

BOLIVIA

A year-long campaign by Bolivia's financial and landowning elite has obstructed and frustrated the work of the Constituent Assembly (CA). In August 2007, the city of Sucre, seat of the CA, was brought to a halt by mass right wing led demonstrations in favour of making it the seat of government, rather than La Paz, which they consider too close to the militant Altiplano region. Then a "strike", organised by the business community and landowners, shut down Cochabamba, hitherto a stronghold of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) and the popular forces.

A major political crisis now faces the country. Morales and the MAS have made repeated concessions to the right, who are now blocking the CA and threatening to declare total autonomy for the resource rich southern and eastern provinces (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija, the so-called Media Luna or half moon). This is the base of the business, landowning and banking elites, who are eager to exploit the huge oil and gas reserves, as the local agents of multinational corporations.

Evo Morales has on several occasions backed down when the right threatened him – effectively conceding them a minority veto in the CA, allowing the right wing Senate to limit its powers, and most recently offering to hold another referendum on the constitution and even to resign. It is clear the right will refuse



The assassination of leading guerilla Raul Reyes, nearly caused a tense stand off between Ecuador and Colombia

to recognise any democratic mandate, except one that puts them back in power and guarantees their continued plunder of the natural resources of the country.

In the midst of this crisis, the Bolivian working class has begun to organise itself politically, with talk of founding a new working class party. But the time for talking is drawing rapidly to a close. What is urgently needed now is decisive action to thwart and smash the counter-revolution planned by the right and the American Embassy.

In Mexico in 2006, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Vicente Fox stole the election. The moderate populist, candidate López Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) eventually accepted defeat, once the teachers, municipal workers, urban and rural poor of Oaxaca (the Oaxaca Commune) had been crushed. After this, a democratic counter-revolutionary stabilisation set in.

Once again this defeat was due not to unwillingness of the masses to struggle, but to the treachery and weakness of their political leaders, particularly Obrador and the PRD, but also the

Zapatista (EZLN) leader, Sub Comandante Marcos (having renamed himself Delegate Zero apparently unaware of the irony), who led small symbolic marches at the other end of the country, while Oaxaca was isolated and brutally put down. Obrador stood coldly aside. Yet in 2007, signs of revival began to emerge.

As in all other regions of the world, it is plain that the period of easy victories and soft-focus populist illusions and vague promises is coming to an end. When, as in Bolivia, the property question – ownership of the land and mineral and oil resources – is posed by the masses, the counter-revolution raises its head. The popular movement then has to use force to make it submit, or to submit to it, i.e. to retreat, and to betray the real, concrete needs of the masses. In other countries, most notably Venezuela, the question of revolution or counter-revolution will be posed in the coming years.

The New Scramble for Africa

Africa is becoming more and more important to the "great powers", especially the US, for linked economic and strategic reasons. The USA's National Security Strategy 2006 recognises this: "Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this administration."

Richard Haass, president of the US Council on Foreign Relations, in his foreword to the 2005 Report pointed out that: "By the end of the decade sub-Saharan Africa is likely to become as important as a source of US energy imports as the Middle East."

The Gulf of Guinea's share of US oil imports is expected to rise from 15 to over 20 per cent by 2010, and 25 per cent by 2015. The discovery of new reserves and the expansion of oil production are turning states in the region into major oil exporters, including Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, Cameroon, and Chad. Sudan, bordering the Red Sea in the east and Chad to the west, is an important oil producer. The US is taking more and more of a proprietorial interest in these resources and is watching, with an increasingly jealous eye, China's penetration of the continent. Commentators are openly talking of a new "scramble for Africa".

The Wall Street Journal noted in an appropriately titled article, *Africa Emerges as a Strategic Battlefield*: "China has made Africa a frontline in its pursuit of more global influence, tripling trade with the continent to some \$37 billion over the last five years and locking up energy assets, closing trade deals with regimes like Sudan's and educating Africa's future elites at Chinese universities and military schools."

China imports more than a quarter of its oil from Africa, primarily from Angola, Sudan, and Congo. It is Sudan's largest foreign investor. It has provided heavy subsidies to Nigeria to increase its

influence, and has been selling fighter jets there. Most threatening from the standpoint of US grand strategists is China's \$2 billion low-interest loan to Angola in 2004, which has allowed it to reject IMF demands to reform along neoliberal lines.

This enhanced priority of Africa for the US is being expressed through military commitments – funds, training, troops and equipment – to certain chosen gendarmes, plus a direct presence. US arms sales to Ethiopia, which has one of Africa's largest armies, have roughly doubled, and military aid has increased two and a half times. George Bush has established US African Command (Africom) to guard its newly enhanced sphere of influence.

The US base in Djibouti, from which the US-Ethiopian intervention in Somalia was organised, gives it strategic control of the sea-lanes and maritime zone, through which a quarter of the world's oil production passes. The Djibouti base allows the US to dominate the eastern end of the broad oil-rich cor-

ridor cutting across Africa, running southwest from the 994-mile Highteig-Port Sudan oil pipeline in the east to the 640-mile Chad-Cameroon pipeline and the Gulf of Guinea in the West.

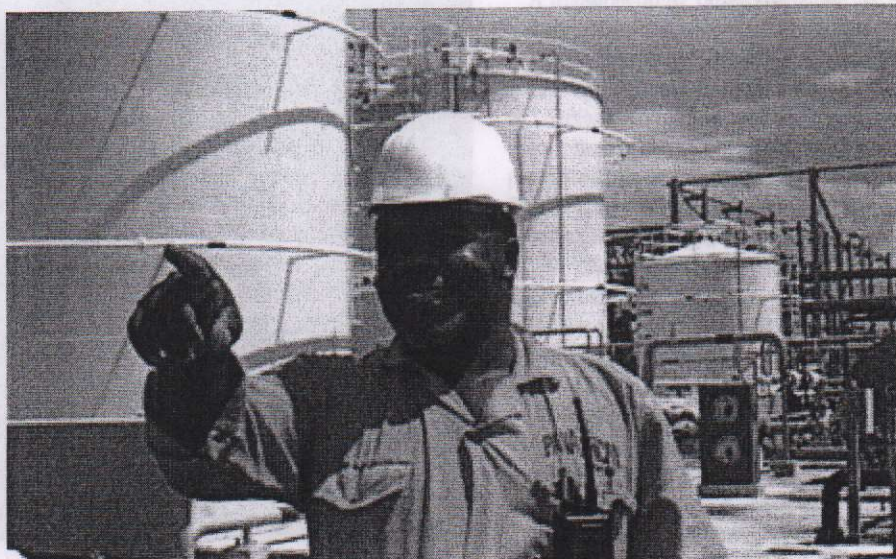
There is also the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), which Congress funded at \$500 million over six years in 2005. The US navy has, in addition, conducted increased manoeuvres in the Gulf of Guinea.

INSTABILITY AND INTERVENTION

The major U.S. and Western oil corporations are all scrambling for west African oil, and demanding security, given the corruption and instability of most states in the region. Hence there are incessant calls and no lack of seeming justifications for US "humanitarian interventions" in Africa.

Since 2003, Sudan has been torn by civil war and ethnic conflict in Darfur (where much of the country's oil is located). Attempted coups occurred in the petro-states of São Tomé and Príncipe (2003) and Equatorial Guinea (2004). A successful coup took place in Mauritania in 2005 against the US-supported strongman.

Chad has been run by the dictatorial regime of Idriss Déby since 1990, and is backed by France and the US. It saw an attempted coup in 2004 and a sustained rebellion since in 2005. The French have maintained a military presence in Chad since "independence" in 1960. The country is now in the throes of another battle for the capital. The speed with which the



Gas processing plant in Tanzania



Economic crisis in Zimbabwe grew, along with political instability

UN Security Council condemned the rebel advance, and gave the green light for French military intervention (though the latter is hesitant) is indicative that major imperialist interests are at a stake and they fear the installation of a pro-Sudanese regime in the capital, N'Jamena.

Kenya, a regional gendarme and model state for carrying out IMF "reforms", was massively destabilised by stolen elections. Once again, imperialism clearly prefers the incumbent Mwai Kibaki, because he oversaw the neoliberal reforms, the "success story" of high growth rates. Unfortunately for him the "growth" has had the universal result of creating huge, impoverished slum quarters around the capital and other cities, and therefore an electorate desperate for change and social reform.

The defeated Railla Odinga and the Orange Democratic Movement leadership, however, are members of the tiny millionaire elite (five or six families from different ethnic groups), who have run the country since independence. As a populist, offering only very vague promises to improve the lot of the poor, he resorted to fanning ethnic rivalries – and Kibaki responded in kind. In the slums and in the rift valley where there are old rivalries of land distribution, this turned into pogroms, in which nearly a thousand people have died.

The imperialists have thus been able

to divert attention from the stolen election, trying to impose a compromise that undoubtedly will have as its core the continuation of the IMF policies that have impoverished the slum dwellers and created the crisis on the land in the first place.

Nigeria, the regional gendarme, is rife with corruption, an armed insurgency in the Niger Delta region, and the potential of ethno-religious based conflict between the north and south of the country. Last year's elections were universally condemned as corrupt. There is also talk in US policy circles that its military might before long need to intervene in Nigeria. Atlantic Monthly correspondent Jeffrey Taylor wrote in April 2006 that Nigeria has become "the largest failed state on earth".

When it comes to failed states, however, the Congo, with its enormous and largely untapped mineral reserves, will be a key prize in the decade ahead. Since 1994, the Congo has been wracked by ethnic strife and civil war, the bloodiest since World War II. Almost 5 million people have died as a result of the fighting. Over a million remain internally displaced in the east of the country. Though a peace deal was reached, the country remains deeply unstable, and enmeshed in the rivalries of the states of the great lakes to the east (Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda).

In southern Africa, Zimbabwe remains

in freefall. Inflation rose to 66,000 per cent per annum in December 2007, leaving many workers to survive by growing their own food. However, the prospects for an immediate revolutionary upsurge have diminished, partly because 3 million Zimbabweans (out of 13 million) have fled to South Africa, partly because Thabo Mbeki supports Robert Mugabe, but mainly because the working class, via the trade union leadership, have been tied to the pro-IMF Movement for Democratic Change, an alliance with large capitalist white farmers.

South Africa itself has seen an explosion trade union struggles in 2007, including a one-day general strike and a united public sector strike of nearly one million workers, which lasted 28 days and involved pitched battles with state forces. The background to these struggles is the neoliberal boom, which has enriched the middle class and ruling elite, while unemployment stands at 40 per cent and half the population survive below the poverty line.

Politically, however, the Cosatu trade union federation and the South African Communist Party remain in a popular front government with the African National Congress, and support Jacob Zuma, Mbeki's heir apparent, who regularly declares himself in support of current economic policies.

Throughout Africa, it is clear that bourgeois democracy, in the absence of a powerful and stable middle class and labour aristocracy, repeatedly produces corruption and clientelism, and inflames ethnic and tribal antagonisms. The privileged military remains an enormous source of coups, civil wars and interventions to clean up the corruption of the politicians.

This vicious cycle of corrupt bourgeois populist politicians and military dictatorships has not, it is plain, been broken by the neoliberal opening up and claimed development. On the other hand the absence of working class parties, armed with a programme of permanent revolution, means that there is an enormous crisis of leadership, which becomes obvious during every civil war, general strike and mass street movement, which occur with remarkable regularity.

Europe: class struggle intensifies

The imperialist powers that dominate the European Union – Germany and France – pressed on in 2007 with their project of an “ever closer union”, based on the Lisbon Strategy (adopted in 2000) to make it the “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world”.

At Lisbon, they had recognised the pronounced tendency to low productivity and stagnation of economic growth in continental Europe, the product of the USA's capacity to throw the burden of its economic problems onto its transatlantic partners, plus the higher social costs faced by European capital as a result of the historic strength of the workers movement. An added spur was Europe's perceived helplessness, faced with the chaos of the Balkan Wars of the mid-to-late 1990s, when US military power had to be called in to bomb Serbia into submission.

The dominant EU powers were momentarily disconcerted by the defeat of the neoliberal European Constitution in France and the Netherlands in 2006. It required changes of leadership in Germany and France, before they could resume the process of building their federal superpower. In fact, they simply re-labelled the bottle, replacing the “constitution” with a “treaty”, which retained 90 per cent of the formers content, vowing to discourage any more referenda.

Germany has made it clear that any of the smaller states that do consult their people and reject it will not be allowed to delay its implementation (i.e. they will unceremoniously be put out). Germany has threatened Poland in advance. A process of ratification by parliaments is underway and is unlikely to be seriously disrupted.

Nevertheless, the process of implementing Lisbon is still causing major

conflicts. In Greece, the last year has seen two huge general strikes, dockworkers' strikes and mass demonstrations against an unpopular right wing government. In France, too, workers have halted or weakened the implementation of Lisbon several times over the last five years.

FRANCE

France is in many ways the key to the entire project, and the French ruling class have at last acquired a unified executive determined to force it through, a compliant legislature and a divided and weakened political and trade union opposition. But they still face the most militant and battle hardened working class and youth movement among the major European states. Nicolas Sarkozy's election on an open programme of attacks on the working class left the reformist parties (both Socialist and Communist) in

confusion, and convinced the trade union tops that a negotiated surrender is the best they can hope for.

Since his election Sarkozy has lost no time. The first wave of attacks against the workers includes:

- Restrictions on the right to strike and an obligation to provide a “minimum service” in the transport sector, where the vanguard of the French working class is:

- Privatisation of the state owned companies; mass job cuts the public sector; the first steps towards privatisation of the universities

- The end of the “special” pension schemes for railway, metro and electricity workers

- A new ministry of immigration and national identity, whose goal will be 25,000 deportations per year.

The vanguard of the French working class sensed the danger and responded militantly. The first big battle was around the pension schemes of the railway, metro and electricity workers. Rank and file workers showed they were prepared for a long and hard struggle, but it soon became clear that the union leaders were not. All the unions federations, except the smaller Sud, were convinced that their role was not to organise resistance, but to negotiate minor concessions. How did TU leaders manage to derail the strike, despite the determination and combativity of the workers?



First, instead of mobilising all the workers attacked by Sarkozy, they mobilised them on separate days. After a highly successful day of action and strike on 18 October, railway workers stayed on strike for a few days. But the CGT leaders convinced them to return to work, and prepare another strike for the following month. Then, they went for a day of strike for the whole public sector on 20 November. However, railway and metro workers were asked to go on strike a week earlier, on the 14th.

Worst of all, on the eve of the big strike, Bernard Thibault, the leader of the CGT, the most militant of the larger federations, called for separate negotiations with the government in each sector (railway, metro, electricity workers), obviously splitting their forces. This stab in the back led to massive anger and resentment among the rank and file. Nevertheless, the railworkers stayed out on strike for nine days, determined to unite the strikes of 14 and 20 November – and to then extend them some.

Was a general strike against Sarkozy possible? Yes, it was. The key missing element was a political force, a revolutionary party with roots in the working class, intervening with a clear line in the movement. This should have been to foster workers' self-organisation in the struggle beyond the *Assemblées générales* (workplace and local general meetings of all those on strike, in every union and in no union). Elected strike committees, local, town and national coordinations (embryonic councils of action) were the crucial tools to break the bureaucratic control of the movement.

These workers' rank and file leading bodies should have taken the power to decide how to organise the strikes and the demos, and when and how to negotiate. They would have organised actions to mobilise workers in other sectors around an action programme. They would have created joint committees with the students, as well as self-defence squads against scabs, police and provocateurs.

However, the workers and youth were unable to do this. Pushing through the pension reform was a major victory for Sarkozy, but not necessarily a strategic defeat for the French working class – providing the fightback is organised immediately. The ugly face of Sarkozy's politics is now evident, as is the betrayal of the trade union leaders, at least to the mass of vanguard fighters. The task is to

rally them into a revolutionary party to stop further betrayals and lead the workers to victory.

Here the role of the so-called revolutionary left is critical. Will it help or hinder this process? The *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), after Sarkozy's election, mobilised for a national movement of resistance. Yet in the struggle, as the union leaders' betrayal became clear, the LCR failed to sound the alarm or call on workers to resist it.

The LCR has also called for the foundation of a new party, based on all those "defending an anticapitalist programme in struggle and in elections". While a public debate on the basis of such a party is to be welcomed, it is certain that the LCR will not argue that what is needed is a new combat party, won to a revolutionary programme and a Leninist organisation.

Lutte Ouvrière (LO) has been in a stagnant condition for some years and, though it criticised the union bureaucracy for abandoning the struggle against Sarkozy in November more sharply than did the LCR, this criticism remained within LO's traditional economism.

Indeed its idea of a political initiative is to seek a place on the Socialist Party's electoral lists, while rejecting the LCR's overtures to be part of the movement for a new anticapitalist party. The disagreement with this of the longstanding LO public faction has earned it virtual expulsion from LO. It is clear that LO is part of the crisis of leadership, and can contribute little or nothing to its solution.

GERMANY

In Germany over the last decade, all governments have consciously stuck to three major objectives, designed to cohere an imperialist European bloc under German (and French) leadership:

- Taking on the German working class by implementing the Lisbon strategy (and therefore its German version, Agenda 2010)

- Increasing German imperialism's military capacities and its diplomatic stand in the world.

- Deepening and transforming the European Union into a viable economic and political entity, a stable imperialist bloc under German and French leadership: the overarching strategic objective of the ruling class.

This has been done against the background of low growth rates and near stagnation of the German economy,

expressed in GDP terms, even though German capitalism has increased its competitive strength in relation to most capitalist economies. The other side of the strengthening of German monopoly and finance capital was a massive decline of working class real wages and income.

The successes of German imperialism – while far from complete – were possible as a result of the defeats of the workers' movement in the period 2003–05, which saw a number of mass mobilisations, including a mass, spontaneous unemployed workers' movement. This resulted also in massive ruptures between the German Social Democracy (SPD) and sections of the working class, including parts of the trade union bureaucracy – resulting in the creation of the Electoral Alternative (WASG) and then in its fusion with the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), forming *Die Linke* (The Left) as a second, bourgeois workers' party.

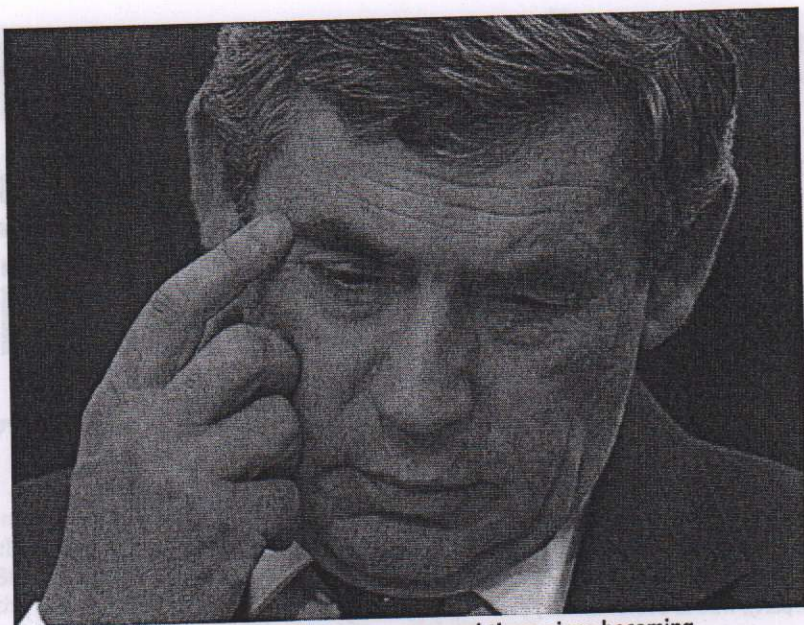
Meanwhile, the anticapitalist movement scored an important political success in the anti-G8 mobilisation in Heiligendamm in June 2007, although its radical wing proved incapable of taking advantage of this.

However, the creation of *Die Linke* and the success of the mobilisations in Heiligendamm, plus the beginning of sharper economic disputes over wages, all show that Germany is entering a new phase of increased and sharpened class conflict, which will be further triggered by the effects of a US recession. The crucial question is: how the growing discontent and unrest can be transformed into action, political mass strikes against the coming attacks, resistance against the bureaucratic and reformist barriers inside the workers movement – SPD, *Die Linke*, the trade union leaderships and the *Betriebsräte* (works council) bureaucracy – and against a growing fragmentation of various sectors of struggle.

This will mean fighting not only for class struggle organisations, rank and file movements in the unions and workplaces, and a revolutionary youth organisation etc. but also to put the necessity of a revolutionary party at the centre of our agitation and propaganda.

BRITAIN

In Britain, Gordon Brown's Labour government has announced its intention to hold down public sector pay increases to about 2 per cent per annum over the



Gordon Brown has been forced to retreat several times since becoming prime minister

next three years, a real wage cut of between two or three per cent, probably more, year-on-year. Union leaders at the Trade Union Congress in September 2007 had threatened a winter of discontent and "coordinated industrial action" unless the government relaxed pay norms, but most went on to do deals within the limit. However, their excuse to their members – the need to secure a new term for Labour – was exploded by Brown's panic at a slump in the opinion polls and postponement of the election till 2009-10.

Likewise the four-month on-off strike of the Communication Workers' Union was sold out by its leadership – general secretary Billy Hayes and his deputy Dave Ward. The deal conceded the employers' strategic demands, "reform" the pension scheme, flexibility of shifts and deployment, job reductions of up to 40,000 out of a 130,000 workforce, and a below inflation wage agreement, lasting for two years.

The union leadership was disoriented by the employers' intransigence – imagining one to two-day strikes would pressure them into serious negotiations – then panicked when Royal Mail imposed later start times in October, provoking illegal wildcat strikes in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Liverpool. The final blow forcing their abject surrender was the legal injunction against the next round of strikes, because of supposed irregularities in the balloting procedure. Given the absence of any organised

alternative leadership to the supposedly left union leaders, it has proved impossible for the membership to resist their betrayals. Not since the early 1990s was the burning need for a rank and file movement, independent of the left bureaucrats, so openly and brutally demonstrated. The so-called revolutionary left, in the shape of the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party, proved utterly useless in this task, restricting themselves to the role of cheerleaders and then apologists for the bureaucracy.

At the same time, the political crisis of leadership has also been manifest. The two major unions that have split from Labour, the railworkers and the firefighters, have taken no concrete steps for three years towards creating a new working class political party. In the postal strike many CWU militant became enraged with the Labour Party wanting the union to cut off its funds to Labour, many cancelling their own payment of the political levy.

Again, here, the centrist parties, the SWP the SP and the Scottish Socialist Party, have scarcely even tried to win vanguard militant trade unionists – tens of thousands of whom are utterly disillusioned with Labour after tens years of attacks on them – to the project of breaking the union link in order to form a mass workers party now on the basis of the fighting unions and anti-neoliberal, antiwar movements.

United States of America

In the US, since 2000, imperialist capitalism has seen an accelerating rise in its contradictions, both internally – economic, social and political – and in its place in the imperialist world order.

A short, sharp recession in 2001 saw two million workers lose their jobs, falling real wages and a further explosion of consumer debt, as workers and the middle class too tried to keep their heads above water through massive borrowing. Meanwhile, low interest rates meant not only a housing bubble, where prices rose above their underlying value, but a boom in corporate expansion and profits, combined with an enormous increase in the inequality of their distribution. Lastly 11 September 2001 – 9/11 – gave the Bush-Cheney administration the excuse it needed to launch its war on terror, a unilateral offensive to restore its imperialist power, focused on the key regions of the Middle East and Asia, with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and a wave of patriotism and repression at home.

Now these contradictions – economic and military, domestic and global – are reaching their tipping point, with resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with a credit crunch, housing market collapse, and a looming recession at home.

The US working class has suffered three decades of attacks on its standard of living since the 1970s. Real wages have fallen almost continuously; productive manufacturing jobs have been slashed, to be replaced by low paid service sector jobs; while poverty grows, especially among the lower sections of the working class, black, Hispanic and immigrant workers.

The union bureaucrats, rather than fight this offensive of capitalism, have instead sought to “protect” jobs with an endless series of givebacks in wages, pensions, health provision and, of course, of mass redundancies. The result is an historic low of only 12 per cent of the working class in unions, and defensive, isolated, though often militant strikes, many

of which have been lost or shockingly sold out by the leaders. Under the recent contract, negotiated with the United Auto Workers, for instance, General Motors gained the right to replace older workers with new employees, on contracts as low as \$14 an hour and slashed benefits: i.e. about half the present rate of \$28 per hour.

Yet the working class has not remained static or passive in the face of decades of attacks. It has been strengthened by millions of immigrant workers from Africa, Asia and, especially, Latin America. Forced to work in the worst jobs, at the lowest pay, and under sweatshop conditions, these workers have begun to assert their power. The first mass political strike in many decades took place on 1 May 2006, called “A Day Without Immigrants.” Upwards of 5 or 6 million participated and saw sections of industry such as construction, meat-packing, landscape businesses and some California ports effectively shut down.

Nevertheless, a series of militant or even illegal strikes (e.g. the New York tube drivers) have not been able to break the dead hand of the union bureaucracy, whose answer to the decline in union density is to merge into ever larger, more bureaucratic unions. Small but significant rank and file groupings in the unions have arisen out of these strikes and sell-outs, calling for union democracy and a more militant policy aimed at recruiting the unorganised, often immigrant layers. Building these into a conscious rank and file movement that can break the control of the bureaucracy and turn the unions into democratic class struggle organisations is a key task for the US workers.

US DEMOCRATS

The union leaders continue to waste tens of millions of dollars supporting the bourgeois Democratic Party in elections, though it is a thoroughly capitalist party,

dominated by big business, in which the unions’ influence has been marginalised. The Democrats are committed to the same neoliberal reforms, free trade agreements and imperialist adventures as the Republicans.

Though of course willing to mount an electoral come back in 2006 on the massive hatred for the war of workers, youth and progressive middle class layers, the Democrats then proceeded to give in to George Bush on every major issue of funding, increasing the numbers of US troops in Iraq (the “surge”), thus betraying the electors who thought they were electing the anti-war party. So it will continue to be, whether it is Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, who becomes the Democratic candidate and, if s/he wins the November elections, the next president.

This crisis of expectations could be particularly acute, if Barack Obama is the Democrat candidate and wins the election. Obama has upped his rhetoric on economic issues (The Washington Post has accused him of “class warfare and populism”). He denounced the Bush administration’s use of torture to 20,000 supporters in Houston and told them he would end the war in Iraq in 2009.

Since Obama’s hopes of beating John McCain in November would rest on his ability to mobilise millions of first-time, young voters, this rhetoric could lead to those same millions being disillusioned, if he wins, and therefore possibly becoming radicalised.

But this would depend on solving a massive crisis of leadership in the working class. Central to this is the building of a mass working class party that can provide an alternative to the neoliberal, racist and imperialist Democrat Party. Through struggle and genuine workers’ democracy, socialists would have to win such a party to a revolutionary transitional programme.

BOSSES’ OFFENSIVE

The US employers’ offensive to raise the rate of exploitation has driven an assault on every front against the working class. In 2005, US workers as a whole produced over 30 per cent more each hour they work than in 1995. This hike in exploitation was aided by the use of Japanese kaizen methods involving speed-ups and team-working. For example, General Motors car plant workers used to produce only 45 seconds of actual work each

minute, but in the newer NUMMI (GM-Toyota joint venture) plants, this was sped up to the Toyota standard of 57 seconds of actual work.

Textiles, apparel, and chemical factories are "offshored", with big net job losses, or moved to the largely non-unionised South, which over the last half century has grown over the past quarter of a century to accommodate nearly one third of US-based industry. Due to new technology and productivity growth, automobiles, rubber, machinery, electrical equipment and food production, along with their associated construction, transport, and communications jobs, have moved South. The unions have failed to follow them.

Both trends – relocating plant to low wage areas or countries, and restructuring to intensify work and raise productivity – have meant 5 million job losses in traditionally unionised, better paid manufacturing jobs. This has accelerated in the new century with nearly 2.9 million manufacturing jobs lost under the Bush administration alone.

In response, union leaders have made massive concessions on wages, health-care and pensions, in a failed bid to defend jobs, often allowing two-tier workforces to arise with the newer workers on schemes stripped of benefits. As a result, not only have real wages fallen continuously for US workers since the 1970s (except for a short period in the second half of the 1990s), but the "social wage" of healthcare benefits and pension provision has fallen, too. Kim Moody, in his recent work *US Labour in Trouble and Transition*, shows that real wages for production and non-supervisory workers have fallen from a high point of an average \$315.44 a week in 1972 to \$274.49 a week in 2006.

The ideology of the US union bureaucracy has always supported capitalism, even in the more militant "industrial unionism" of the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO). After World War II, a pattern of national collective bargaining became the norm, whereby the union bureaucracy took on the task of negotiating wages, so that the militant shop floor struggles of the 1930s were replaced with procedures based on partnership with business, capitalism and US imperialism abroad.

The 2005 split in the AFL-CIO that produced the rival "Change to Win" federation was a bureaucratic one, with no

qualitative difference between the two sides. Union members were not consulted or asked to vote on the split with the AFL-CIO.

The Service Employees International Union, now the biggest union in the US, was the driving force in the split. It is the fastest-growing union in the US, contradicting the overall trend towards union decline, by doubling its numbers in the past decade. Partially this has been through a merger process, but largely through organising. However, the union's policy, expressed in clear terms by its leader Andy Stern, is overtly business unionism – i.e. partnership with the big corporations.

Nevertheless, the SEIU does organise the unorganised and the low-paid, often immigrant workers, and was key to the "Justice for Janitors" campaign of the 1990s that pioneered the approach of organising drives that draw on the creativity, energy and militancy of rank and file workers, utilising street agitation and drawing in students, churches, NGOs – what has become known as "social movement trade unionism."

The SEIU focuses on sectors not threatened directly by globalisation and offshoring, i.e. cleaners, hotel workers, bus drivers and health workers. As a result it is not building the kind of industrial power at the heart of surplus value production. In addition, it avoids any real workplace-by-workplace organisation, activism and democracy at the level of the union local (branch). Indeed it combines specific categories of workers into cross-state "mega-locals", whose members can never practically meet.

A massive bureaucracy of professional organisers plans the campaigns and carries them out. With increased scale come increased resources for the bureaucracy to expand into new labour markets, just like the corporate expansion logic of Starbucks or GAP, on which Stern openly models his approach. The new union bureaucrats are as bloated in their incomes as the old. Top union leaders are paid up to \$700,000, while thousands of staff are paid over \$100,000 apiece.

It is clear that the unions cannot be changed by simply electing "left" bureaucrats. They can only become fighting organisations at workplace level by organising a rank and file movement with the conscious task of transforming the unions:

- Regularly elected officials, who are

instantly recallable to those who elected them, and who work for the average wage of those they represent

- Building strike committees, and demanding that those in struggle control the action and the negotiations

- A policy of "with the leaders when they represent the members' interests, without them or against them where necessary" – demanding that all those seeking the rank and file movement's endorsement in elections submit themselves to its discipline and agree to fight for its democratically agreed policies.

Fighting for effective class struggle trade unionism, requires the breaking of all links to Democratic Party, and this poses the struggle for a "labor party" – i.e. a mass workers' party, embedded in the unions, workplaces and popular districts. Our aim must be, as our programme states, the dissolution of the trade union bureaucracy as a caste.

But none of this will possible in disjunction from the struggle for a class independent, political party – i.e. a revolutionary party that takes up politics in the workplace, on the streets, in the racially or nationally oppressed communities. One too that is overtly and proudly anticapitalist, that combats anticommunism, business trade unionism and "laborism". One that encourages into its ranks the youth of all classes, winning them to the side of the working class. To achieve this requires a political force, fighting for these transformations as party of an international tendency.

Tactical and strategic tasks: how to fight for a Fifth International

Leon Trotsky made an important distinction between the tactical and the strategic in working class politics, but stressed their relationship as that of the parts to the whole.

"Tactics are limited to a particular problem. Revolutionary strategy covers a whole combined system of actions which, in their interconnection and their successive character, as in their development, must bring the proletariat to the conquest of power." Trotsky Criticism of the Draft Programme of the Communist International, 1928

He stressed too that, for the epoch of the Second International, the latter, i.e. the conquest of power, was only a distant prospect, and this meant that all the areas of tactics – trade union work, parliamentary elections, etc. – could be dealt with in isolation from this goal. After the outbreak of the war of 1914, after the full realisation of the nature of the imperialist epoch as that of the decline of capitalism, the struggle for power was something that could open up in any major crisis and therefore had to be present as a goal and as a potential lodged in every area of working class activity.

This was the element in Lenin's method, which Georg Lukacs drew attention too. "This means that the actuality of the proletarian revolution is no longer only a world historical horizon arching above the self-liberating working class, but that revolution is already on its agenda." Lukacs Lenin, 1924

This method was equally that of Trotsky. "It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming

from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat." Trotsky Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, 1938

In the aftermath of the downfall of Stalinism (1989-91) in Russia and Eastern Europe, and the restoration of capitalism in China (1992-95), many self-styled Leninists and Trotskyists proclaimed that the potential for proletarian revolution (its actuality) had been postponed to some indefinite future period, that, in the words of the Fourth International (USFI), the epoch of the October Revolution was over, and that the distinction between revolutionaries and reformists was no longer operative, when it came to building working class parties.

This strategic retreat was reinforced by the flourishing of what became known as globalisation. Revolutionaries restricted their attacks to neoliberalism, rather than capitalism, and picked up the term "Empire" rather than using the term "imperialism". They advanced programmes, which were anti-neoliberal, suggested broad parties that might just join anti-neoliberal coalitions (i.e. violate the ban on taking office within the straightjacket of the capitalist state that even the Second International had rejected before 1914).

We in the League for the Fifth International denied that we had passed beyond the imperialist epoch, so brilliantly characterised by V.I. Lenin, or beyond the epoch of October – i.e. the epoch of the proletarian revolution. Indeed, we foresaw – beyond the undoubted counter-revolutionary phase,

which followed the historic defeats imposed on the workers and poor peasants of Russia, China, etc. by the Stalinist and Maoist bureaucracies – an new period of revolution, made inevitable by the destabilisation caused by the restoration of capitalism.

From the beginning of the new millennium we observed the end of this counter-revolutionary phase, and the opening of a pre-revolutionary period, i.e. a potential transition to a new revolutionary period, based on a historic crisis of globalisation. This we re-emphasised in our last congress (in 2006) thus:

"Our perspectives more and more borne out: revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations continue to occur, accompanied by severe crises of leadership and all this still in the top phase of the industrial cycle. However, signs emerge of the end of the cycle with possible crashes in the next two years, possibly even earlier. The US response is likely to be another war but this has the potential to enormously destabilise not only the Middle East but relations with Russia and China."

CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

But as the Death Agony of Capitalism also stated in its opening section, the imperialist epoch and most periods within it are not only characterised by the potential for revolution, for the struggle for power, but also by a jarring disjunction between this rotten-ripeness of capitalism for the transition to socialism and, at the same time, the terrible unpreparedness of the workers movement to undertake this historic task thanks to its counter-revolutionary leaderships. This Trotsky summed up as the crisis of proletarian leadership.

"The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.... The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International

It is no accident that degenerating centrists of all descriptions often waxed ironical over this concept (Healyism, catastrophism, living in the past, etc.), or that the Workers Power (Britain) minority (now Permanent Revolution) decided the crisis of leadership was postponed by the (imaginary) long upward wave of capitalism since 1990, till a new period, opening in 2015, and had been replaced

in Britain at least by a crisis (lack) of struggle.

Such a convenient pushing off the agenda of the tasks of building a revolutionary party, including through building disciplined fighting propaganda groups, leaves the more comfortable prospect of "theory", "regroupment discussions" and routinist participation in the trade unions, voting Labour etc. without sharp slogans that require winning the vanguard to break with reformism and the trade union bureaucracy.

The tasks of real revolutionaries are indeed a "grand narrative"; indeed they are historic; and we are not, despite our size, ashamed to say this. They are three-fold:

- To point out, in theoretical analysis, in propaganda and in agitation, the fact that capitalism is a historically doomed and reactionary system that inflicts wars and impoverishment on the great majority of humanity and can never do otherwise, and that, with a regular periodicity, it creates great social and economic crises, which offer the proletariat the possibility to put an end to it

- To link today's and tomorrow's spontaneous resistance and revolts against crisis and war into a conscious revolutionary movement of millions against the entire system – embodied in just such a transitional programme as Trotsky developed in 1938, 70 years ago

- Last but not least, to create a global party of the working class – a new, revolutionary International – as the instrument for coordinating the struggles of the workers and their allies in every country against the common enemy, globalising capitalism, i.e. imperialism; the national units of this world army will be the sort of combat party that Lenin and his comrades built in the Bolshevik Party, the party of the October Revolution and the power of the workers' soviets.

Seventy years ago, Leon Trotsky and his tiny handful of followers founded the Fourth International to replace the three older Internationals. Today our task is to proclaim the necessity of founding a Fifth International, and to set out to do so in all the mighty struggles of the years ahead.

Such a foundation cannot be restricted to the rallying together of small propaganda societies on a common programme and with a real operative international leadership, important as that is,

but is a task that must also be addressed to the militant vanguard of the working class and the oppressed, on every battle-front where they are fighting a life and death struggle with imperialism and its agents.

FIGHTING THE EFFECTS OF RECESSION

In the years immediately ahead, workers in both the imperialist and semi-colonial countries are likely to face an oncoming capitalist recession, with its inevitable accompaniments of sudden workplace closures, wholesale unemployment, slashing of real wages, destruction of past gains in terms of welfare provision and social services, and heightened fear and insecurity for those who keep their jobs.

The first phase of a recession is a critical one for the working class. If the employers and their states are successful in making workers pay the full cost, then its effects can be to greatly damage the workers' movement, weaken or break the power of the unions, set section against section, increase the poisonous fumes of racism and national chauvinism.

However, this need not be. During the first shock of an approaching recession, when the great mass of workers realise the emptiness of the promises of perpetual prosperity and economic expansion, and the need to unite and resist, then the possibilities of generalised resistance, of political mass action become that much greater.

The obstacle to this within the workers' movement is the trade union bureaucracy and the reformist parties, which will do all in their power to fragment, delay and sabotage a united response, and to turn the politics of direct working class action – the political strike, the general strike – into harmless protests, and resignedly waiting for the next election.

The task of revolutionaries is to put forward, as widely and as convincingly as possible, the need for direct action, for a concrete strategy for resistance. This requires not just supporting the demands for no closures of workplaces and militant action to enforce it – strikes workplace occupations, mass solidarity with every section under attack, etc. – but also mounting an exposure of the real culprits, the banks and the corporations, with the demand to open their books and databases to verify their

wretched excuses for their losses and bankruptcy, to reveal their chicanery and swindling.

If they really open their books, the reason for that might be that they are really bankrupt. In this case we have to argue that this bankruptcy is a result of the capitalist mode of production. We will then raise the demand to nationalise, under workers' control, all firms declaring mass redundancies, with no compensation to the exploiters.

In all countries where the recession is powerful and generalised, the fight for such demands to protect the working class will lead to the necessity for class wide action, for coordinated mass strikes or for a general strike. Nor will one-day protests be sufficient, but an all-out general strike. All experience worldwide shows that general strikes that are left in the hands of a trade union bureaucracy are doomed to betrayal.

The struggles against the results of the recession, therefore, also carry the possibility to start initiatives for rank and file organisations in the unions. It might be also possible for new parties to emerge from this form of organisation, seeking not only an economic but also a political combat unit.

The task of revolutionaries is to fight for a revolutionary programme with transitional demands in these new workers' party initiatives. We must have neither an opportunist nor a sectarian approach towards such projects, but understand such formations as united fronts, where we wage an ideological struggle. In the end of the day further economic catastrophes can only be stopped if such a party exists on the basis of a revolutionary programme, and fights to overthrow global capitalism by a socialist revolution and replace it with a globally planned economy that aligns to the needs of the masses, rather than to the profit of a tiny minority.

RESISTING THE WAR ON TERROR AT HOME AND ABROAD

Though the antiwar movement has undergone an overall decline in the size and frequency of its mass mobilisations, this does not indicate reconciliation by the masses to the US and its allies' war-mongering. Every election over the past few years has seen the masses seeking parties that they think will end the wars, alas in vain.

Indeed there is little doubt that any serious opening up of a new front by George Bush in Iran would lead to a new upsurge of mass militancy. Despite the decreased probability of an attack on Iran, the antiwar forces around the world need to be ready for mass action, should it nevertheless take place.

Meanwhile the wars in occupied Iraq, Afghanistan and now within Pakistan continue, as does the US backed Israeli inhuman torture of the people of Gaza, and the US sponsored Ethiopian war against the Somali resistance. Other "independent" fronts of the war on terror exist – Vladimir Putin's occupation of Chechnya, the Turkish government's attack on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Sri Lankan government's bloody war against the Tamil people, the Colombian government's terror against the workers and peasants' movement, as well as its war on the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

All these remain as issues, where revolutionaries must support the resistance of the oppressed peoples and denounce the actions of imperialism and its agents. All of these remain burning issues that the antiwar and anti-imperialist movement must concentrate its activities on in the year ahead. A vital issue will be to assist all those Palestinians resisting the Annapolis "final solution" to the Palestinian question.

PUTTING FORWARD A REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY IN REVOLUTIONARY SITUATIONS

In Latin America, we must engage in the fullest way possible with the Venezuelan workers and peasants' resistance to imperialism and its local agents. In doing so we must not confuse Chávez' "socialism of the 21st century" or his "Bolivarian social revolution" with the genuine article. We need to help the Venezuelan working class to take over the leadership of the revolution, to direct their actions towards genuine workers' control and expropriation, to the creation of real councils of workers' delegates, as well as similar councils in the shantytowns and countryside, to break the tutelage of the Chavista bureaucracy.

The socialist revolution has not yet triumphed in Venezuela. But it can triumph and, if it does, it can open a new world revolutionary period, especially in conditions of an oncoming world recession.

As elsewhere, however, resolving the crisis of leadership will be critical to this.

Another vital front of struggle is aiding the resolution of the crisis of leadership within the ongoing revolutionary situation in Pakistan and other arenas of struggle, such as the courageous resistance to the reactionary war in Sri Lanka or the bloody counter-revolution in Burma. In India, workers and poor peasants' struggles against the growing inequality and exploitation, the land thievery and SEZs, that come with globalisation, the brutal exposure of the reformist Communist Parties' neoliberalism in state and federal government are all creating the basis for not only a revival of Maoist guerrillaism, but also the opportunity to create a new working class party on a revolutionary programme.

In the Middle East, not only do mass resistance movements against war and occupation exist, most of them Islamist (Hezbollah, Hamas, parts of the Iraqi and Afghan resistance), but in Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt there are also developing democratic, anti-imperialist, and trade union resistance against powerful oppressive regimes.

Conferences in Cairo and Beirut have helped open a democratic space for such movements and created links to the anti-capitalist and antiwar movements in the rest of the world. But here, as elsewhere, an open space alone, or the creation of alliances on a popular front basis will only block class independence and, therefore, the question of revolutionary workers' parties is posed here too.

In Africa – subjected as it is to a new imperialist scramble for its incredible natural resources – where movements of resistance by workers and the urban poor are mushrooming, we need to link to these struggles. The dangers of the populism of bourgeois cliques degenerating into tribalism can only be met by class organisation, and not simply by trade unionism, but by mass political organisation, which stresses the class struggle and workers' power as the only solution to underdevelopment and imperialist super-exploitation.

In 2007, too, in the context of the Beijing Olympics, helping China's semi-legal and illegal workers and peasants' movements become an open part of the world movement against capitalism will be an important task.

The central task of the coming years is

twofold:

- To help the vanguard militants of the working class and the vanguard of their allies in all progressive struggles to break politically and organisationally from the reformist, Stalinist and populist agents of the bourgeoisie in their movements

- To overcome the isolation of revolutionary communists in tiny propaganda groups, bringing about a fusion between communism and the vanguard of class fighters.

These tasks must be pursued in tandem – discussion on the detailed basis of programmatic agreement, alongside the key demands and tactics to address to the masses in struggle against economic recession, war, and the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations they generate.

Whatever major advances and breakthroughs that can take place on a national level (and, indeed, such breakthroughs must necessarily occur on this basis) must also, from the beginning, be linked together on an international level. This is the task the League for the Fifth International sets itself. We will seek in all this work to find and strengthen our links with co-thinkers and co-fighters from every major front of the class struggle around the globe.

What we stand for

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit rather than human need. It is the root cause of poverty, insecurity, unemployment, all forms of social oppression, and the destruction of the environment. It cannot be reformed out of existence piecemeal. Its ruling class, the bourgeoisie, must be overthrown forcibly and expropriated so that all the large scale means of production become the property of society.

Capitalism creates its own gravedigger, the modern proletariat. The working class both manual and white collar workers, workers in production, commerce, administration and social services makes up the majority of the population in all the developed capitalist countries and is a growing force in the Third World.

The working class, because of its concentration at the heart of capitalist profit making and its systematic exploitation in this process is the only class with both the historic interest and the objective power to bring it to an end and replace it with a higher form of social organisation which abolishes exploitation and social oppression completely.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

The replacement by of capitalist production for profit by socialist production, planned to satisfy human need can be accomplished only by a socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state in every country. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There is no peaceful, reformist, democratic or parliamentary road to socialism not because of the bloodthirstiness of revolutionary communists but because the bourgeoisie will never give up its power and possessions as a result of an election.

THE REFORMIST WORKERS' PARTIES

The Communist, Socialist, Social

Democratic and Labour parties are not parties of the working class serving its historic and immediate interests. Where they are parties with historic and organic roots in the organised working class but are bourgeois in their politics and practice, we consider them – as Lenin and Trotsky did as bourgeois workers' parties. They represent an historic organisational break from the bourgeois parties – a formal step towards class independence.

Where they are allied or affiliated to the trade unions or provide the bulk of the leadership of the trade unions, acting together as "twin pillars" of a national labour movement they are agents of capital within the workers' movement. They represent a massive obstacle to the winning of the working class to a mass revolutionary party.

Revolutionaries cannot overcome this obstacle simply by propagandistic exposure but must also utilise various forms of the united front, depending on the circumstances and their own strength. Included in these united front tactics can be critical electoral support, entry as a revolutionary opposition into the reformist parties and their auxiliary organisations (youth leagues etc.)

Wherever a substantial section of the proletarian vanguard are to be found in reformist parties, struggling against the reformist leaders, revolutionaries must join that fight whilst seeking to building a revolutionary faction to win workers away from reformism-left as well as right-and to the construction of a revolutionary party.

THE TRADE UNIONS

These basic organs of economic self-defence of the working class are almost everywhere dominated by a privileged bureaucracy -the "labour lieutenants of capital". These unions can only be transformed by a rank and file movement which ousts the reformist bureaucrats, democratises the unions and wins them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the social-



Leon Trotsky, commander of the Red Army

ist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

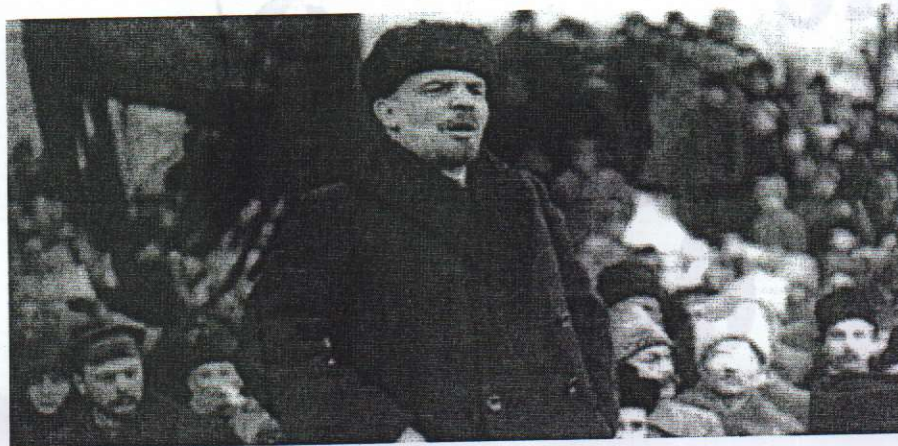
We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class-factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations. If the reformist bureaucrats expel masses of militant workers from the unions or if they neglect the great mass of the most exploited and oppressed proletarians in favour of an aristocracy of skilled workers then a revolutionary party will not flinch from organising new, militant, democratic trade unions, pledged from the outset to the struggle for socialism.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian revolution of October 1917 was not only the first successful workers' revolution but the only one so far that succeeded in establishing a workers' state based on workers' councils (soviets). It remains the fully valid model for the revolutions of the twenty first century. Its key lessons – the need for soviets, for a revolutionary vanguard party, for a workers' militia, for an armed insurrection have become a permanent and irreplaceable part of working class strategy.

However, isolated internationally, in large measure due to the counterrevolutionary actions of Social Democracy in strangling the European workers revolution, the young Russian workers state underwent a bureaucratic degeneration and then a political counterrevolution.

This was led by Joseph Stalin who represented a parasitic caste which took power, destroyed the old leaders and cadres of Bolshevism and crushed the last remnants of workers' democracy. At the same time this caste was not able, in the 1920s, to overthrow the economic gains of the October revolution. Rather it distorted them in the reactionary and



Lenin, founder and leader of the Bolsheviks

utopian project of building "socialism in one country".

In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established by bureaucratic decree, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. By the 1970s the parasitic bureaucratic caste had led these states to stagnation, crises and in the 1990s to destruction. The remains of the bureaucratic caste and in China a still ruling Stalinist party is restoring capitalism and seizing the socialised means of production. Trotsky's prediction that either the working class would destroy the bureaucracy or the bureaucracy would destroy the remnants of the socialised property relations was born out. The working class, politically atomised after decades of Stalinist rule watched as capitalism was reintroduced to Russia and Eastern Europe.

POLITICAL REVOLUTION

As long as the gains of the working class remain in existence Trotsky's programme of political revolution remains valid. Indeed only political revolution can save the state owned industries, planning and the monopoly of foreign trade from destruction. In Cuba and North Korea we are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy.

We opposed the restoration of capitalism. In times of war we unconditionally defend all workers' states against imperialism. In a series of states in Eastern and Central Europe and the ex-USSR pro-bourgeois governments came to power in 1989-91 and set about restoring capi-

talism. Only Cuba and North Korea remain as degenerated workers states, surrounded by hostile Imperialists.

STALINISM

Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class from the 1920s to the 1990s. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution which obstructs the working class from fighting for power have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. In China (1927) in Spain (1939) it helped brutal military dictatorships and fascist forces triumph. After the war in Indonesia (1966) and in Chile (1973) it did the same again. Only the destruction of Stalinism will prevent this record of betrayals being repeated.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION

Oppression because of gender, sexual preference, colour, nationality or age is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

IMPERIALISM

Imperialism is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the

struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support nationalists in these countries fighting to drive imperialist troops out of their countries.

But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaderships, we fight for permanent revolution – working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are always and everywhere for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

THE LEAGUE

The League for the Fifth International (L5I) is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme – *From Protest to Power* – and our day to day policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

The League for the Fifth International does not claim to be a revolutionary International: rather it is an international revolutionary tendency of groups fighting to build one. The last revolutionary International (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The L5I is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to help build a Fifth International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist – join us!

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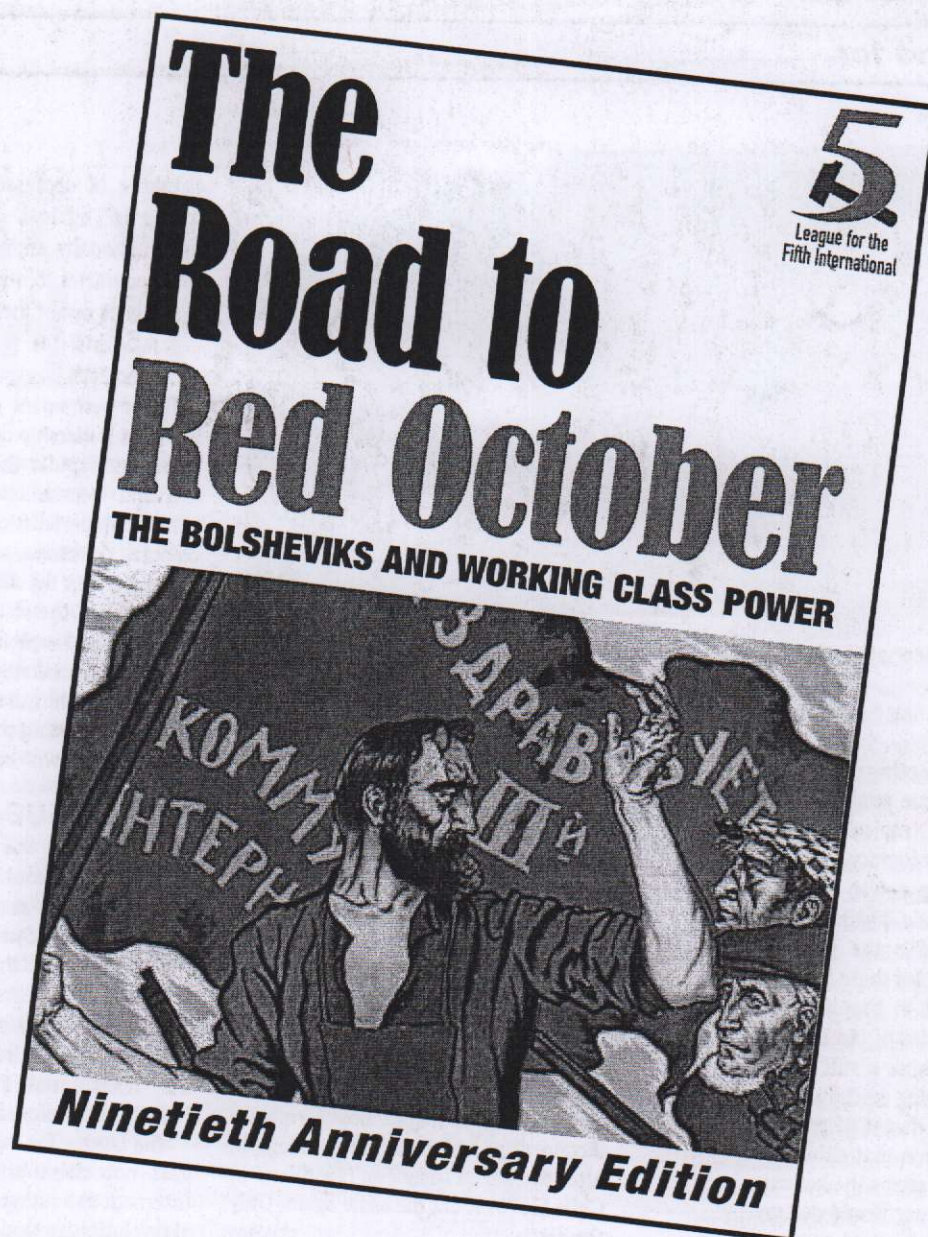
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